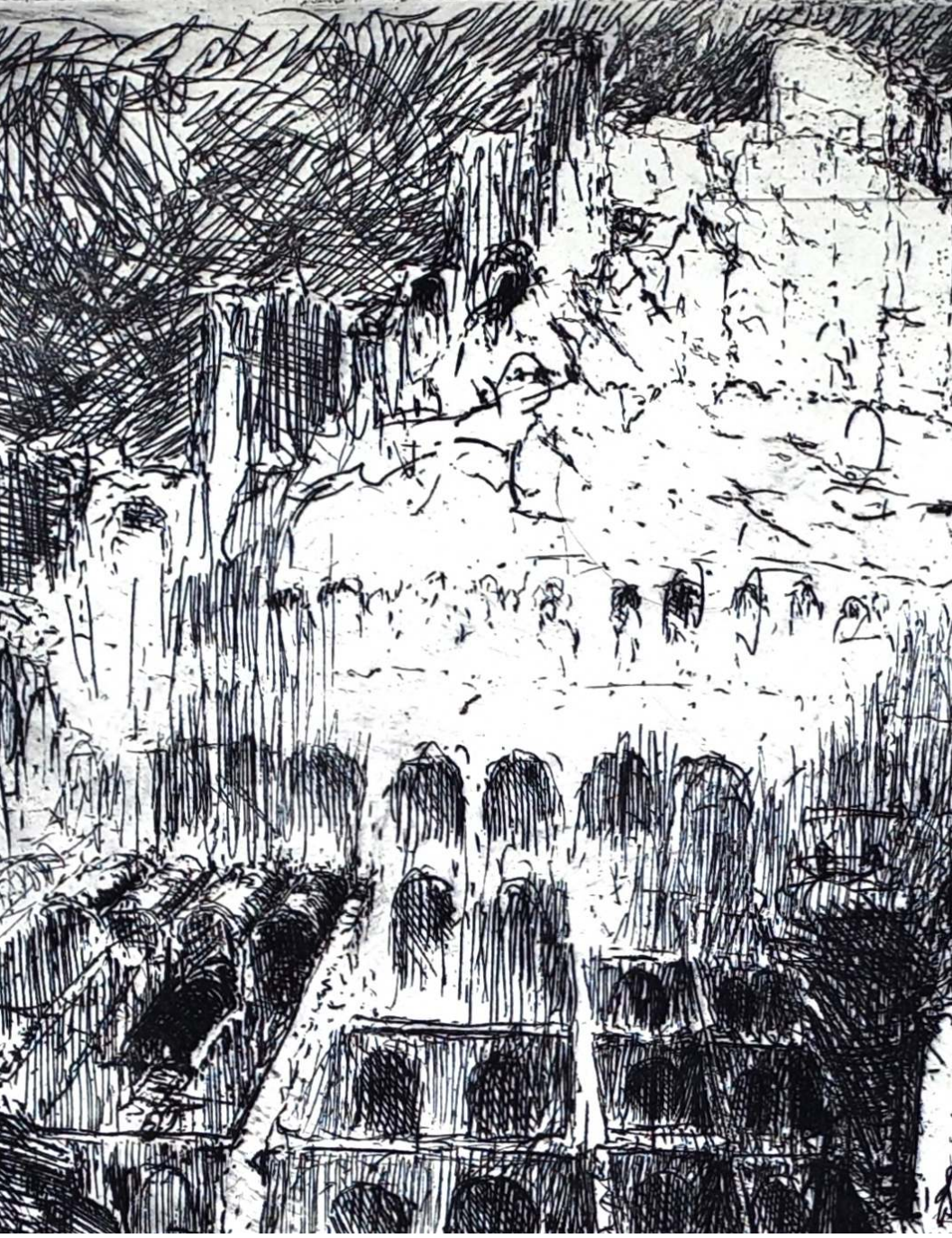

CONSPIRATIO

2025/26

Periodical for
Thinking With Ivan Illich

Cover Image
Babel (detail), Intaglio by George Rembrandt Gutlich, 2006

Periodical Design
Isabelle Cedotti

Guest Artist
George Rembrandt Gutlich

Editor
Sajay Samuel

-
Title: Conspiratio
Format: Online
ISSN: 2998-8438
-

the quest for truth cannot thrive
outside the nourishment
of mutual trust

Ivan Illich

About Conspiratio

Conspiratio is neither an academic journal nor a popular magazine. Each issue of Conspiratio comprises essays, thematic articles, book reviews, and occasional translations of texts on or by Illich. All that appears in its pages typifies what Illich called "research by people", which names disciplined studies conducted by those attempting to beautify their own lives by being less dependent, in thought and deed, on the market and the state. For this reason, research by people is open to public debate and contestation. Though conducted in the medium of the written word, the periodical invokes the hoped-for intimacy of con-spiration. For an orientation, consult two essays by Illich: "Research by People" & "The Cultivation of Conspiracy".

Conspiratio encourages contributions from anyone wanting to participate in thinking with Ivan Illich. All contributions are expected to reveal a degree of familiarity with Illich's thought and to engage it in a thoughtful way. Essays, book reviews, and translations may be submitted at any time for publication. Articles contributing to the announced theme of each issue should be submitted in response to the call for papers at www.thinkingwithivanillich.net

Conspiratio is published annually, online in December each year and in print by late January of the following year. Request a subscription to or order print copies here. To be apprised of current and forthcoming issues, please register at conspiratio@afterillich.net

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Editor's letter

In June 2025, a group of about fifty gathered at the San Cerbone convent in Lucca, Italy, to discuss if *religion, faith, and philosophy* name conflicting ways of life. Some knew Illich personally, others only by hearsay. Some knew one another well; others had never met. This mix generated an openness to strangers and the unfamiliar. Meals were shared at long tables in the refectory. Discussions began in the garden outside the convent walls and continued among smaller groups inside.

Time took its time, scented by an atmosphere of friendship which Illich thought indispensable to any truthful inquiry of the present. To clearly see the present one cannot be of it. Rather, one must be *with* one's time, be a contemporary of it, as Giorgio Agamben has observed.[1] The days in Lucca allowed one to be contemporary to the present instead of being drowned in it.

I imagine the setting in Lucca was not entirely dissimilar to that in Pistoia where, in 1997, Illich gave the closing keynote address at a conference on Girolamo Savonarola— a Dominican friar, who, in 1498, was accused of heresy and hanged. His speech, published here for the first time, was heroically transcribed and translated by Leonardo Eck-Glenewinkel. Heroically, because Eck-Glenewinkel's labor was doubled: once to transcribe extemporaneous speech into formatted text and then to translate from spoken Italian into

1 Giorgio Agamben, "What is the contemporary?", In *What is an Apparatus and other essays* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

Sajay Samuel, sajaysam@gmail.com
Samuel, S. Editor's Letter. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 7-11

spare English. He provides an extensive apparatus of footnotes to buttress Illich's talk—not as an academic conceit but as an invitation to further explore what seems elliptical and sometimes enigmatic in Illich's speech.

The center of Illich's talk lies in his striking claim that *"the time for prophecy is past."* If prophecy is just a churchy word for foretelling the future, for prediction, then Illich is obviously wrong. For instance, the titans of Silicon Valley urge us to have faith in techno-science so they can accelerate the coming kingdom of heaven.[2] And in the everyday reality they have done so much to shape, AI predictions, weather forecasts, and risk calculations function as raw materials for financialized capitalism.

Eck-Glenewinkel's commentary on Illich's talk clarifies what he was after. In the biblical and patristic traditions, says Eck-Glenewinkel, prophecy does not refer to foreseeing the future but revealing the present. Accordingly, it is the very notion of a "future" that makes prophecy—seeing the present—impossible. To say the future is a 'blank canvas' is to already say too much. For the modern mind, the future is not a canvas but a formless nothing to be shaped by human will. According to the historian Paulo Prodi, to whose argument Illich was indebted, the notion of the future as a programmable nothing stems from two ideas —utopia and revolution. In the sixteenth century, utopia gave form to "no-place" or empty space. Similarly, the eighteenth-century idea of revolution made societal renewal or rebirth plausible. Forged by utopia and revolution, the future is "what you make of it," as many American children are taught.

It is against this backdrop that Savonarola appears as the last prophet: he denounces the world while accepting it with a bowed head. After him, diagnoses of the present have

2 Peter Thiel, "Against Edenism," *First Things,* June 1, 2015 (https://firstthings.com/against-edenism/)

almost always been accompanied by the desire to change the world. In this way, Illich's pronouncement in Pistoia is a recognition that prophecy—the clear-eyed seeing of the present without utopian escape or revolutionary renewal—is no longer possible. For Illich, only friendship remains for those who wish to so inhabit the present. Only friendship—vexatious and demanding—can free the believer, and perhaps also the unbeliever, from being consumed by the present or captured by the future.

The next set of essays responds directly to the theme of this issue. Samuel Sonderhoff traces the Roman roots of *religio* and explains why Illich hesitated to call himself a religious man. Since antiquity, *religio* has signified the man-made boundaries that separate the divine from the human sphere. Sonderhoff argues that both those who seek to preserve boundaries and those who seek to abolish them are mired in the present. Giovanna Morelli examines the post-secular moment when all boundaries are sought to be effaced, asking whether this confuses the distinction between religion, faith, and philosophy. Morelli suggests a revived philosophical *askesis* to discern the difference between spiritual hunger and institutionalized forms of transcendence. Wes Avram turns to the parable of the Good Samaritan to explore the unstable heartbeat of Christian life. He shows how Illich's reading of the Samaritan exposes the diastole of freedom from social conventions and the systole of institutional habits that domesticate it. Christian life, Avram argues, oscillates between these extremes.

The next set of essays address the dispositions that marked Illich's way of being contemporary. Neto Leão not only argues that a life lived in fidelity to an event is distinct from a philosophical or religious life but also that St. Paul and Illich were contemporaries precisely because each was not of his time. Simon Ravenscroft's essay on Illich's theological

indirectness examines how Illich's style—his refusal to systematize, his reliance on anecdote and parable—is not an affectation but a stance. It embodies his openness to surprise. In his essay on gratuitous relations, Oscar Krüger places Illich's reflections within a broader debate on money, religion, and gift. Rather than opposing gift and money, as is usual today, Krüger shows how Illich sought to inhabit the tension between them, resisting both the romantic and functionalist justification of modern institutions. Tobias Roberts argues that Illich's "theology of surprise" enables him to see the vernacular—ways of inhabiting the present which are not oriented to a future. In their different ways, all the essays assembled here suggest that surprise, gratuity, and friendship are not concepts to be mastered but rather ways of being open to what is already at hand.

Robert's grasp of Illich as "errant pilgrim" prepares for the final contribution to this issue's theme. John Kurien recounts meeting Illich in Kerala, India in the early 1970s. He remembers Illich as a "wandering monk" and, in his words, a "barefoot prophet." But the prophet he describes is neither a visionary committed to shaping the future nor a foreteller predicting what lies ahead. Instead, it is Illich's distance from the present that freed him to see in it what others overlooked. What impressed Kurien was Illich's resulting attention to the vernacular: how fishermen understood the relationship between wind and sail, how they organized their work; how communities built their own libraries and shared what they had learned. In Kurien's account we glimpse a form of life that does not seek to change the world but to see it as it is. Illich—wayfarer, pilgrim, monk—refused to be overshadowed by the future or drowned in the present by remaining contemporary to it.

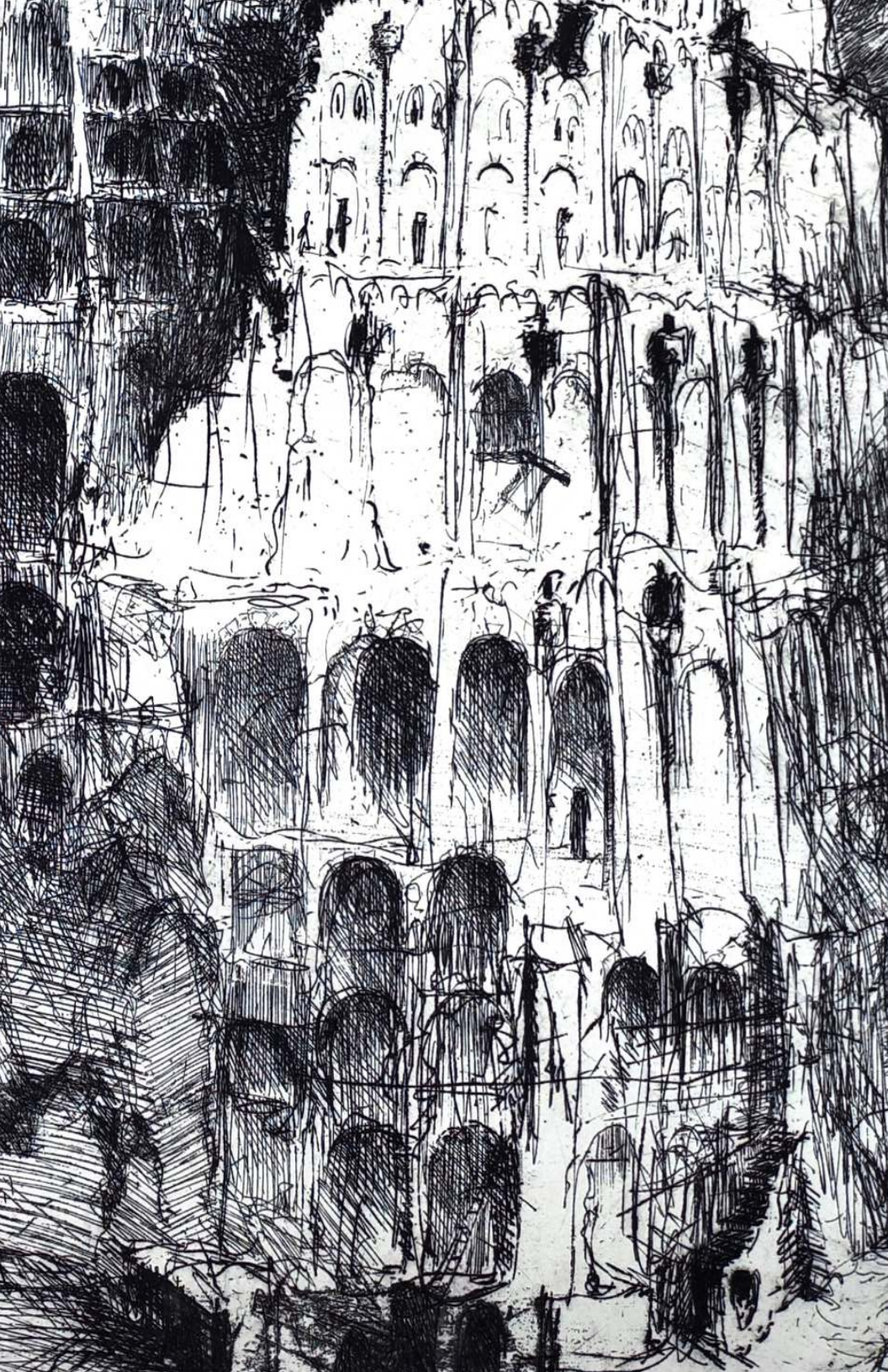
The translation by André Ribeiro and Neto Leão is of Illich's 1966 essay titled "Concerning Aesthetic and Religious

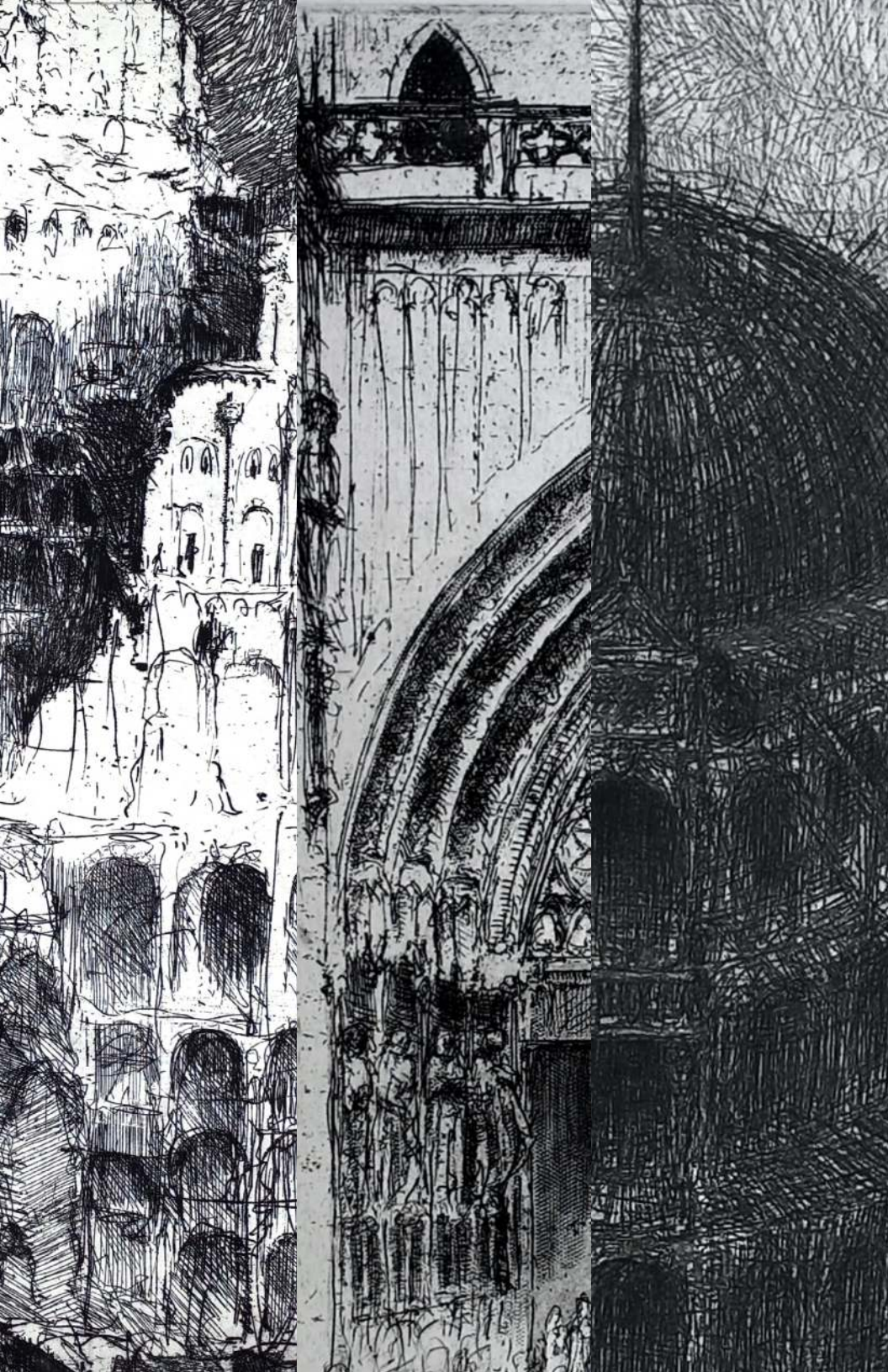
Experience" published in *The Powerless Church and other selected writings, 1955-1985*. By serendipity, that essay has direct bearing on the question of the relationship, if any, between religion, faith, and philosophy.

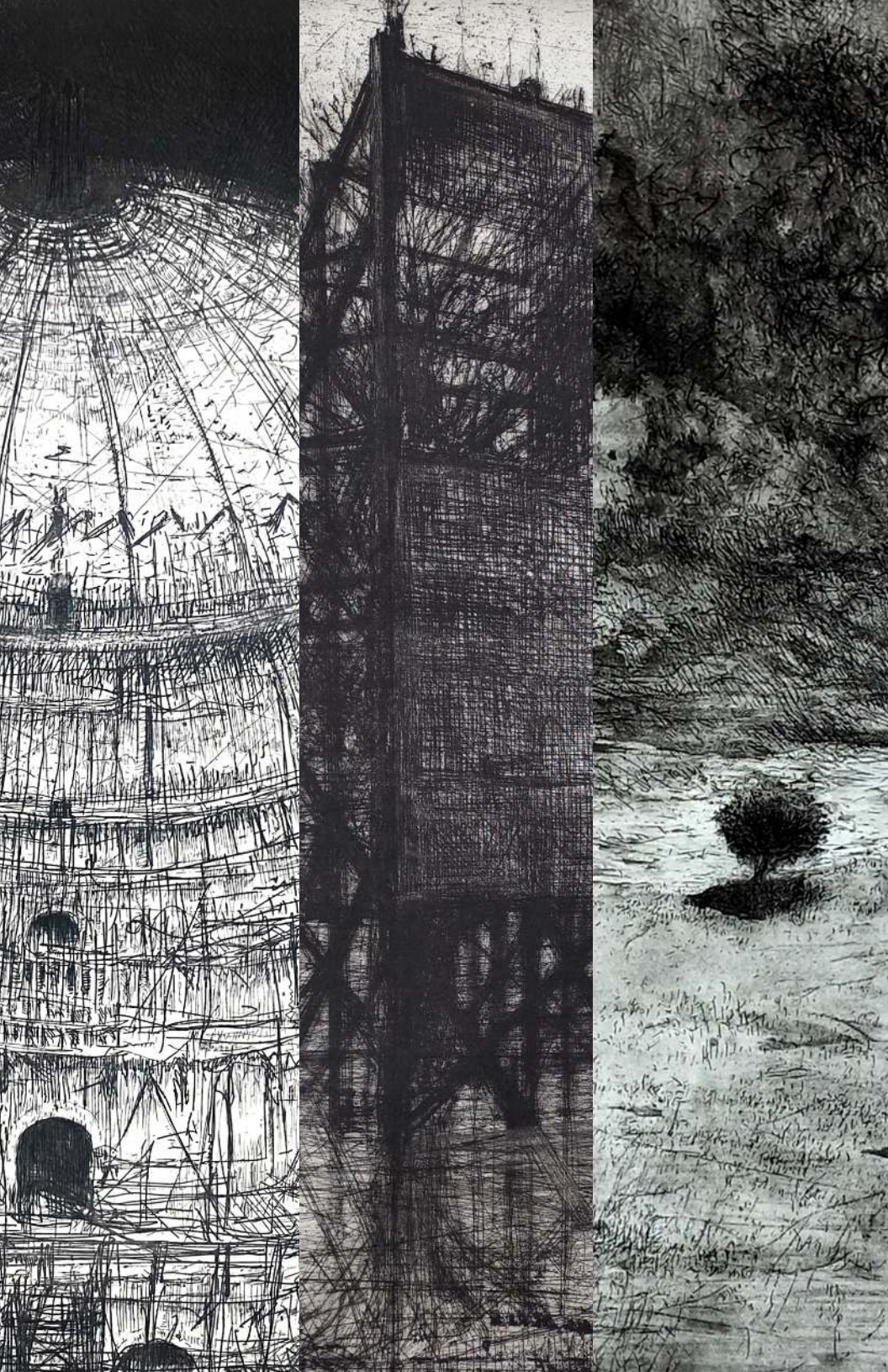
This issue has a new section, titled "Comments." It was sparked by Jose-Antonio Ullate's objections to Renee Uribe's essay on the Church as "she" and "it" which was published in the previous issue. I solicited Ullate's note and asked Uribe to respond. They generously agreed to share their discussion.

October 2025
State College, PA

Essays







"Savonarola: democracy, tyranny, prophecy". Conference about Girolamo Savonarola Pistoia, 23/24 May 1997*.

by Ivan Illich

Thank you, Professor Miegge,[1]

Now, what should be done is to start a three-day-long discussion! Unfortunately, our host here, Father Verde,[2] tells

* This speech was given by Ivan Illich on 24 May 1997 to celebrate the conclusion of a two-day long conference organized by various scholars for the coming fifth centenary of Savonarola's death (1498-1998). While all the academic interventions of the participants were in the book: *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia* a.c.d. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 1998, Illich's contribution was omitted. This speech was transcribed in Italian and then translated into English by Leonardo Christopher Eck Glenewinkel, supported by Sajay Samuel and Samar Farage. The speech itself was delivered in Italian by Ivan Illich and is still available online: https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/94189/savonarola-democrazia-tirannide-profezia-convegno-su-girolamo-savonarola?i=2073054. The speech itself was not in any way modified in its content, but the grammatical structure was minimally altered and adapted to the current written form for better readability; the English translation tries to follow the rhythm of the original Italian speech, but the inevitable gap between the spoken and the written form required some structural interpolations for the English-speaking audience. To contextualize and promote a better understanding of this speech, a rich apparatus of footnotes is added. It was formulated following Illich's example as he exemplified it in one of his books: "These footnotes are not meant to prove but to illustrate and qualify my arguments; they are marginal glosses written in counterpoint to the text, outlines of my lectures to students who have prepared themselves by reading this book. The notes relate to the text as formerly *quaestiones disputatae* related to the *summa*" (*Gender*, ed. New York edition, Pantheon Books, 1982, New p. vii).

1 Mario Miegge (1932-2014). During the conference M. Miegge, protestant theologian from Aosta and professor at the university of Urbino and Ferrara, participated with a piece on the interconnection between prophecy and policy during the age of Hugo Grotius and Immanuel Kant: *Profezia e politica tra Grozio e Kant*, in: *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia*, a cura di Gian Carlo Garfagnini, 1998, pp. 231-242.

2 Armando Felice Verde (1926-2010). Father Verde was a Dominican friar, who was e the prior of the Convento di Pistoia from 1998 to 2001. He studied at the University of Florence under the guidance of Eugenio Garin; much of his study was focused on Girolamo Savonarola. Cfr. Alessandro Cortesi, Adriano Oliva, *Una vita di studio nel convento di San Domenico a Pistoia: Padre Armando Felice Verde*, Firenze, Nerbini, 2007.

Illich, I. Savonarola: democracy, tyranny, prophecy.
Conference about Girolamo Savonarola.
Pistoia, 23/24 May 1997. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 19-45

us that this [meeting] is going to end within the next half an hour […][3].

What I would like to know is *how* it is possible, in our world of risk, probability and virtuality, to talk [not only] about Savonarola but also about Kant, who are almost equidistant to each other.[4] Almost! Once, for some reason, I had to work on the worst of all heretics, a prophet, who during the Middle Ages was represented –as you well know[5]– sitting on a horse and dressed like a cardinal,[6] and this heretical cardinal had the name Mohammed. I know that in Arabic, the horse *Buraq*[7], which then enters the *Book of Muhammed's Ladder*[8], is seen as a nightmare on which someone can ride … how wonderful would it be to now start such a conversation!

[But] first a confession. All my close friends here know it: I was never frightened to give a speech. This is the first time that I am frightened! My friendship for Paolo Prodi[9] drove me

3 Here Prof. Miegge interrupts Illich saying ironically: "Sta arrivando la fine del mondo!" "The end of the world is coming!", to which Illich replies, a bit irritated: "Ah, no, hopefully not!"

4 Again Prof. Miegge interrupts Illich saying: "equally far away [from each other]!".

5 Here it is not quite possible to establish to whom Illich was talking, Father Verde or professor Miegge.

6 Here Illich is referring to iconological tradition in use during the Middle Age to represent the prophet Mohammed as an apostatic cardinal, who once was Christian but afterwards renounced his faith, becoming therefore the Prophet. Still in Dante's *Commedia*, Inf., XVIII, vv. 22-31, Mohammed is represented according to his schismatic and separating past as someone who is split in half, with his bowls hanging out of his broken body.

7 In Islamic tradition the *buraq* is a supernatural equine-like creature, which is mounted by Mohammed during his famous Night-Journeys. Abraham is also said to have sat on the back of this mythical creature.

8 The *Book of Muhammad's Ladder*, known to the West as *Liber Scalae Machometi*, is one of the first literary and historical accounts of Mohammed's Night-Journey and his ascent to heaven. However, the work is spurious and dates to the 13th century.

9 Paolo Prodi (1932-2016), famous and well known Italian historian, worked on many fields but especially on the Council of Trient (*Il Concilio di Trento come crocevia della politica europea*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1979), the papacy (*Il Sovrano Pontefice. Un corpo e due anime: la monarchia papale nella prima età moderna*, Bologna, Il Mulino,

to start this foolishness, this foolish idea to conclude a meeting of great philologists, historians of philosophy etc, with an *intermezzo*, a thematic reflection, a bit like a clown who ends a great theatrical performance. It is friendship which drives me. This is not the friendship of *Phaedo*'s *philia*,[10] which leads to the flourishing of the *politeia*. That art of living together according to virtue requires a "we" —the first plural form of the personal pronoun— formed of those who were born from the womb of the same city. [However,] in my own experience –I was born in 1926– friendship doesn't rise any more from an *us*, but –in the forms I have experienced it– it rises sometimes with great surprise from a *thou*: the "thou" which has been fostered with discipline.[11]

But why do I say this at the beginning? Because today, the organizers have chosen me to give a speech on prophecy. I remember, Paolo, how I once had the inkling that perhaps I

1982), the history of Justice (*Una storia della giustizia. Dal pluralismo dei fori al moderno dualismo tra coscienza e diritto*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2000), the relationship between power and Christianity (*Cristianesimo e potere*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2012), and on the relationship between prophecy and utopia (*Profezia vs utopia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013). He briefly accounts on his friendship with Illich in his book, *Giuseppe Dossetti e le Officine bolognesi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2016, pp. 93-116, pp. 205-218. At the end of this book some letters of him and Illich are printed, pp. 253-271, covering the years 1968-1970.

10 *Phaedo*, also known as *De anima*, in Marsilio Ficino's first Latin translation, cfr. *Omnia Divini Platonis Opera*, … Basilae in officina frobiana, 1532, pp. 491-521.

11 Already in his book, *In the Vineyard of the Text. A Commentary on Hugh's Didascalicon*, Chicago Press, ed. 1996, pp.15-17, Illich points out the importance of the Latin term *disciplina*; cfr. Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Notes de lexicographie philosophique médiévale: disciplina*, in: Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques Vol. 25, 1936, pp. 686-92. *Disciplina* is closely related to the Greek term *Askesis*: "By askesis I mean the acquisition of habits that foster contemplation. For the believer, contemplation means the conversion to God's human face", in: *Philosophy … Artefacts … Friendship*, ed. in: Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Vol. 70: Philosophy of Technology, 1996; cfr. *Ascesis in the Age of Systems. Philosophical propaedeutics to the Christian use of instruments*; this talk was delivered to the American Catholic Philosophical Association at the annual meeting in Los. Angeles, California, 23 March 1996; cfr. *Die Askese des Blicks im Zeitalter der Show* - INTERFACE. In: Weltbilder, Bildwelten. Computergestützte Visionen. Hrsg von Klaus-Peter Dencker, Hamburg, Hans-Bredow-Institut 1995, pp. 206-222.

too could somehow be a prophet.

So let me tell you a story! Four years ago,[12] the text I was working on during that semester, during the whole year, every Friday, from two to seven p.m., in the *Aula Magna*, was a text by Aelred of Rievaulx, a Benedictine monk from Scotland around 1100 AD. From an audience of two hundred –in order to tell you to whom I was speaking– only seventeen knew the prayer of the *Pater* in any language. The text on which I was working was *De ortu amicitae*[13] and this dialogue of Aelred had an incipit: "Ecce, ego, tu et spero tertius, evidente, qui est Christus".[14] But that was not what I discussed with the students during the evening in the aula. No, but I must tell you what happened with the students! Those conversations were shaped by two authors[15] who in that particular year, one in London and one in Chicago, both –more or less– *respectable*[16]

12 In Bremen, Germany, probably around 1994. But Illich started to hold lecture on Aelred of Rievaulx already in 1992; cfr. *Texte und Fragmente. Bremer Vorlesunge in den Wintersemestern, 1991-1994*, pp. 36-37.

13 The correct title is *De spirituali amicitia*, cfr. In: Patrologia Latina (PL), Paris, Migne, 1855, Vol. 195, pp. 659-702. The first book of this treatise, organized as a dialogue between a master and a disciple, has the title *De ortu amicitiae*. But it should be also mentioned that there is a letter by Saint Jerome, who wrote a letter to a close friend with the same title, *De ortu amicitiae*, in: PL, Paris, Migne, Vol. 22, p. 336 [Ep. IV ad Florentinum sive de ortu amicitae].

14 Cfr. PL, Vol. 195, p. 661 A: "Ecce ego et tu, et spero quod tertius inter nos Christus sit"; Mark F. Williams translates this passage as follows: "Here we are, you and I, and I hope that Christ makes a third with us" (in: Aelred of Rievaulx's *Spiritual Friendship*, Scranton: University of Scranton Press, London and Toronto, 1994, p. 29).

15 Here Illich is, probably, referring to Mark F. Williams in London, who in 1994 published his new translation in English of Aelred's book, *De spirituali amicitia*. In his long introduction he dedicated a chapter entitled *Aelred on Homosexuality*, pp. 91-103. The first scholar who acknowledged Aelred's behavior as a homosexual one is John Boswell, in his *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Chicago University Press, 1980, cited by M. F. Williams in his acknowledgment. The second scholar to whom Illich is, perhaps, referring is Brian Patrick McGuire and his *Brother & Lover. Aelred of Rievaulx*, New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994.

16 The ironic doubt by which he expressed his opinion on these two scholars is vividly represented by the sound of the adjective "rispetabbile", which in his mouth was pronounced with a doubling sound on the "b".

medievalists, had published two heavy books which presented the abbot Aelred as a model –I don't know the term in Italian– of a *gay* person. A concept, which according to my knowledge, did not exist in 1148.

Anyway, after four hours of class, two dozen students and some professors came to my home for a plate of *pastasciutta*. This *pastasciutta* is eaten in a land where another concept is unthinkable: you cannot present it –as you say in Italian– *al dente*. It's impossible!

Around 11 p.m. –with my head bursting– I went to rest in my room under the rooftop, but at around 2 in the morning I went downstairs again to the kitchen to prepare myself a cup of tea, without anyone noticing me, because there were still a dozen people discussing. And what do I hear? A professor of linguistics, a colleague of mine, says to the biologist[17]: "Professor Illich is smart. He knows quite well what he's doing. Look! All of us here who have earned a certain right–to enter this house, Barbara's house, with its keys[18]–have gotten used to lighting a candle when we meet, even if we drink just a cup of tea." "And the professor," she continued, "is smart, he knows what he's doing. And you know that the professor believes in this *spero tertius*. And without willing it, we all have come to suspect what he believes". For this reason, I was happy for a moment.

Now, when the organizers sent me this invitation, I told myself: "How do I come to know about my topic when I talk about prophecy?" Therefore, I went to my computer and requested from the university library two years of periodical abstracts and articles from the social sciences and humanities about prophecy. And within two minutes I got three hundred eighty-one of them. You have them here! This word has lost

17 According to Silja Samerski, who met Ivan Illich only in 1995, some of her former colleagues.

18 Barbara Duden and her house in Bremen, Kreftingstr. 16.

all its semantic borders!

For me, the introduction to the historicity of prophecy, to the idea, as you Paolo said, that Savonarola was probably the last one who could appear to be a prophet[19], opened my eyes! It opened my mind! But I don't know where all this is going to take me!

"The professor usually knows what he's doing. He eventually took inspiration from the Indios".[20] Yes. Yes. Yes. I started with friendship, with *philia:* the *philia* which today is the only possibility that I know of by which to establish what, in a second moment, becomes a *us*. In other ages it was the consequence [of *politeia*], when I[21] knew how to consciously blend the wine, the *krasis* (mixture) of the wine, of a city, of a *politeia*. As far as I know, friendship is the only balance which I can oppose to utopia.[22] The *ecce*[23] you see when gazing in her

19 Cfr. Paolo Prodi, *Profezia vs utopia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013.

20 Here Illich is probably integrating his story in Bremen.

21 Here Illich takes the point of view of an ancient Greek living the political life of his *polis*.

22 Illich, already in a speech in 1980 he stated: "... con tutta la disciplina a mia disposizione, insufficiente, – mi critico io stesso per il [mio] passato – cerco di parlare di quello che *non* è possibile; cerco di evitare, sempre, l'utopia, la descrizione di quello che *dovrebbe* essere [...] la buona legge che tratta dell'habitat dovrebbe, anzitutto, essere una legge proscrittiva e non una legge prescrittiva, una legge che dice quello che non puoi fare, che nessuno può, nemmeno il governo può fare, e non una legge che dice quello che per ognuno si *deve* fare" (Convegno "Autocostruzione e tecnologie conviviali", Rimini, 1 marzo 1980).

23 Here the Latin term *ecce*, taken from Aelred's before mentioned incipit, defines the incarnation of the Other, my vis-à-vis. *Ecce* is an exclamation which can be translated with "Look, there!" or "Here, he/she is!", like in the famous biblical phrase: *Ecce homo*! Erich Auerbach (1892-1957) on the word *ecce* wrote: "This is found less frequently in the elevated style than in Plautus, in Cicero's letters, in Apuleius, etc., and especially in the Vulgate. When Abraham takes the knife to sacrifice his son Isaac, we read: *et ecce Angelus Domini de caelo clamavit, dicens: Abraham, Abraham.* I think this linguistic maneuver, which effects so sharp an interruption [scharf unterbrechende Sprachbewegung], is too harsh to stem from the elevated style of classical Latin; but it corresponds perfectly with the elevated style of the Bible. And furthermore, Dante uses the Biblical *et ecce verbatim* on another occasion where a state of affairs is interrupted by a sudden, though not quite so dramatic occurrence [Ereignis]" (in: *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, translated by Willard R. Trask, 1953, pp. 180-

eyes and seeing in the *pupilla*—this strange thing about which [Titus] Livius and others have very interesting texts—through which I receive *Ivan* from her[24], because I cannot meet nor find *him* elsewhere. This *ecce* is the only response I can develop against—and now I'm saying something very risky—the tyranny of our days, which is the tyranny of need. I would like to talk about that!

But let us return to Paolo Prodi. I immediately obeyed because he, more than a friend, is a *maestro*[25] of the historical enterprise done by a believer. He –more than anybody else except Gerhard Ladner[26] –left a visible impression on my mind. Ladner opened my eyes to the fact that the *reformation*, after which comes the *revolution*, is a concept which was mediated by the Gospel. And it was he who helped me to think about this peculiar problem.[27] As an historian, I

181). I don't know if Illich was aware of this passage, but in his book *In the Vineyard of the Text* he mentions Auerbach's books, especially *Mimesis*, in his bibliography.

24 Here the *pupilla* becomes the mirror in which the individual, Ivan or whoever, sees himself as reflected in someone else's eyes. Here the human being becomes literally an *I* thanks to the *thou*; cfr. Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (1923): "Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich". In the English translation: "Through the *Thou* a man becomes *I*", in: *I and Thou*, trans. by Ronald Gregor Smith, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1937, p. 28.

25 I would like to maintain the word *maestro* instead of teacher because it is closer to the Latin word *magister* with all the connotations of devotion and respect.

26 Gerhard B. Ladner (1905-1993): "One of the *great* and overwhelming fortunes of my life has been the teachers I've had, and among them, Gerhart Ladner is one of the foremost. He is a professor of medieval history, mainly of the history of images, of iconography, in the Middle Ages, a very learned man who in the early 1960s wrote the first volume of a work which will probably remain unfinished. The second, he might finish as a gift to me. For the third, he's too old now, he'll die before he writes it. His book deals with the idea of reform. Reform, in Latin, means turning around, like a wheel, *revolutio*. In this first book, Ladner looks at the end of antiquity, Roman antiquity, and notices that three characteristic types of *revolutio*, turning around, or *reformare*, putting back into form, can be conceived", in: *Ivan Illich in Conversation. The Testament of Ivan Illich* ed. by David Cayley, Toronto, Anansi, 1992, pp. 210-211.

27 Cfr. *The Idea of Reform Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* by G. B. Ladner, Harvard, Cambridge, 1959. G. B. Ladner is quoted by Illich already in his book *Limits to Medicine. Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, New York, Penguin Books, 1977, p. 182 in a bibliographic footnote, as well in *Gender*, 1982,

must recognize that there were people who believed in personal reformation, in conversion as the only contribution which can be done—to change myself so that I can change the world. And it is Paolo Prodi who has said what yesterday Professor Leonardi[28] had beautifully called "la conoscenza soprannaturale per profezia,"[29] referring it to *this* concrete historical person: me! But more than anything else, it was the love and the esteem of this disciple[30] that drove me to say "yes" to Paolo, despite my great discomfort.

May I be excused for talking in such ways about an experience. The audience will understand that otherwise I have no clue how to conclude this very rich *paella* –I don't know how to say it in Italian– this *pasticcio fantastico*[31], because I deeply believe it is absurd that I should speak on

New York, Pantheon Books, p. 6, pp. 158-159, and of course in his famous book on Hugo of Saint Victor: *In the Vineyard of the Text A Commentary on Hugh's Didascalicon*, Chicago University Press, 1996, p. 5, p. 17, p. 19, pp. 31-32: "whose grateful pupil I am".

28 Claudio Leonardi (1926-2010). He was a very important medievalist who, beside an intensive academic life, concentrated all his intellectual effort to reshape the idea of the *Latin* Middle Age as a specific cultural manifestation and interpretation of this peculiar historical period of the West. His magnum opus *Medioevo Latino. La cultura dell'Europa Cristiana*, Firenze, SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004, is the concrete result of this intellectual enterprise. Leonardi especially highlighted Savonarola's figure as historical and not as an apocalyptic prophet: "Savonarola non ha interessi apocalittici ma storici" (p. 739). He places Savonarola (cfr. pp. 693-740) in a long line of specific individuals who shaped this particular type of historic prophecy: from Gregorius Magnus to Caterina da Siena, passing through the spirituality of Thomas Becket, Jean d'Arc and finally Thomas Morus. For Leonardi, martyrdom and prophecy shared a common, deeply historical, dimension. Here I would like to thank *ex imo cordis* Alice Musso because of whom- I discovered all this.

29 "The supernatural knowledge thanks to prophecy"; cfr. Thomas Aquinas, *In de divinis nominibus*, cap. 2, lec. IV: "[unitionem per fidei] *indicibilem*, idest quae humano magisterio doceri non potest; *et mysticam*, idest occultam, quia excedit naturalem cognitionem."

30 Illich speaks about himself.

31 In Italian *pasticcio* means "mess", something confused and unformed, but it also defines a common dish where pasta, ragù, and cheese are put all together in the oven. Like a *paella* where different elements are mixed together, a *pasticcio* becomes the gastronomic emblem for a combination of different things which then create something new.

this topic. My competence in this matter—Florence in its last decades of the Quattrocento or Savonarola [himself]—is abysmal compared to the academics here, this dozen scholars to whom Father Verde–to whom I say: two times *felice*[32]–has exposed us. My competence is abysmal because until the day you, Paolo, called me in Mexico, I was–I didn't find a dictionary today in this beautiful library– *vergine*[33] in front of Fra Girolamo. And as you may see immediately, I didn't lose this *verginità*. Some months later, this more than seventy-year-old man had to say to him: "This time, Girolamo, you caught me!"[34] I cannot add anything to the knowledge about this man or his background. However, I do know one thing about prophecy. I did for theology the same thing I did for the social sciences, and I was surprised by how much the concept of prophecy in the Old Testament has changed in the last thirty years. I want people to understand that prophets do not appear among the Jews, but the Jews appear because there were prophets. The causality is reversed!

32 Here Illich is playing with words: Felice, is the second name of Father Verde, Armando *Felice* Verde, and at the same time *felice* in Italian means "happy". So, in this sense he is happy twice: for his name and for the occasion.

33 *Vergine* means "virgin", but in a deeper sense, also, "untouched", "pure", "innocent".

34 I would like to underline how in the original text, "Questa volta, Girolamo, m'hai colto" the verb *cogliere* means not only to "catch", but also to "harvest" (*raccogliere la frutta*), to "pick up" (*raccogliere qualcosa*), to "perceive" (*cogliere qualcosa*), to "surprise" (*cogliere di sorpresa*), to "caught red-handed" (*cogliere in fallo*).

Here Illich, in his Italian speech, is somehow echoing some words by Savonarola himself, who said: "Orsù, uditemi. Iddio, tu mi hai colto […] Gesù aiutami: questa volta tu m'hai colto", cit. in: *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola* di Roberto Ridolfi, terza edizione, Sansoni editore, 1974, prima parte, p. 390. An English translation of this text is available as *The Life of Giovanni Savonarola* by R. Ridolfi, translated by Cecil Greyson, New Work, Alfred Knopf, 1959, p. 263. If we compare the pages to which Illich refers in his notes *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished), pp. 161-166, we can establish that this was the edition on which he worked to prepare this speech.

This passage, where Savonarola begs in front of the Lord Jesus for forgiveness because he, Girolamo, renounced him because of fear and pain, is already reported by P. Villari in his *La storia di Girolamo Savonarola e de' suoi tempi narrate da Pasquale Villari con l'aiuto di nuovi documenti*, Firenze, Felice de Monnier, 1861, p. 197, and in its appendix, Documenti: CCXVIII, CCXCII.

All I can do is to explain the effect which it had on me, not the person you see present now, but on the person[35] who came in first contact with these slopes, these Pre-Alps –this huge mountain of books which go under Savonarola's [name]– [all] these studies on Frate *Giovanni* Savonarola –it was really beautiful, you couldn't foresee it.[36]

It made me laugh when the ecclesiastical authorities insisted three times on *Giovanni*, because when I arrived in New York[37], instead of going to Princeton where Kantorowicz[38] was waiting for me to write a thesis, I discovered the Puerto Ricans. I applied for work in a Puerto Rican parish as a young priest of twenty-five years. I entered to meet monsignor Casey, but while going up the stairs, where I saw my first television showing MacCarthy between his lawyers, Casey asks me"[39] "Excuse me, but don't you have a *Christian* name?"

35 This passage is quite unclear. Probably Illich talks about his "older" self, when he just began to work on Savonarola.

36 At this point Illich starts to grunt and to laugh like a teenager pleased by his own joke. Savonarola's name is purposely changed from Girolamo to *Giovanni*.

37 Ivan Illich arrived in New Work by ship in Winter 1951. Cfr. *Ivan Illich (1926-2002). Sein Leben und Denken* by Martina Kaller-Dietrich, Wien, Bibliothek der Provinz, 2007, p. 51; *Ivan Illich. Cronologia della* vita by Fabio Milana, in: *Pervertimento del cristianesimo. Conversazioni con David Cayley su vangelo, chiesa, modernità*, a cura di Fabio Milana, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2008, pp. 128-129.

38 Ernst Kantorowicz (1895-1963). Famous medievalist and historian, author of *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (1957). As far as I know, this is the first record by Illich on Kantorowicz, who after the famous events of the *Fundamental Issue* was called from Berkely to Princeton on 29 December 1950 by Oppenheimer. Cfr. *Ernst Kantorowicz. Eine Biographie* by Robert E. Lerner, Klett-Cotta Verlag, 2020, p. 396 (Engl. orig. *Ernst Kantorowicz. A Life*, Princeton University Press, 2017). According to Illich previous accounts he went to Princeton because: «I thought of doing a postdoctoral thesis [...] on alchemy in the work of Albert the Great. There are some very good documents at Princeton, and I had an invitation», in: Illich, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 84. This «invitation» could have been issued by Kantorowicz, but also by an old friend, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), who was lecturing in Princeton on Thomas Aquinas. Cfr. *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 61-62. Kantorowicz was also a good friend of Gerhard B. Ladner, both met in Berlin in Autumn 1929 at the MGH-Bibliothek, and together with Ernst Robert Curtius Ladner was a visiting member in Princeton in Autumn 1949; cfr. R. Lerner, *op. cit.*, 2020, p. 166-168, p. 395. On the relation between Illich and G. B. Ladner, see fn. 27.

39 This story was already told in 1970: "In 1951 Father Ivan Illich, a young Euro-

I say: "Ivan, Johannes". [Casey]: "Ah, that's all right! We will call you Father Johnny."[40] I lived for five years as Johnny Illich, or Don Juan for *los puertorriqueños*. Father Verde, it was this symbolic gesture of the [ecclesiastical] authority that you could not foresee.[41]

This morning, during your virtuous *canto*[42]—I heard it as I say it because it was a speech but also a *canto*— I continuously thought about Savonarola, not as [he is] usually discussed —as an incarnation of contradiction, or a coat-hanger of an *arrabbiato,*[43]or complexions of a *cordero,*[44]—but as vis-

pean recently ordained in Rome, had arrived in the United States and been assigned to a church in New York's Washington Heights, a conservative Irish neighborhood which was receiving a startling influx of Puerto Rican immigrants. He was welcomed to his parish by its pastor, Monsignor Casey, a hearty Irishman who had once served as secretary to Cardinal Spellman. "Ivan Illich?" Monsignor Casey asked incredulously as he greeted his new curate. "What kind of a name is that to go around with?" "Ivan is Johann, Jean, John", the young priest answered affably, always enjoying his control of many languages. "Ivan sounds Communist", said his superior, "we'll call you Johnny", in: *Divine Disobedience. Profiles in Catholic Radicalism* by Francine du Plessix Gray, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1970, p. 241.

40 Here Illich, talking directly in English, mimics the broad Irish-New Yorker accent of monsignor Casey.

41 Here Illich draws a direct line between the incorrect naming of Savonarola's name, *Giovanni* instead of Girolamo, and his own name, *Ivan*, the Slavic version of Giovanni, which was "transformed" by the same ecclesiastical authority in *John*. Playfully, Illich identifies this as an invisible and spiritual bondage between him, Ivan, and *Giovanni* (sic!) Savonarola, both "equally heretics".

42 Father Verde's held a speech, *Girolamo Savonarola: ideologo e profeta. Il quaresimale del 1491*, in: in: *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia*, a cura di Gian Carlo Garfagnani, SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 1998, pp. 127-147. I have preferred to maintain the Italian word *canto*, instead of "song", because it is directly linked to the Latin word *cantum*, which has to the traditions of hymns in honor of God but also to the Italian verb *incantare*, to "enchant", to "putt a spell". Father Verde's *canto virtuoso* was a powerful hymn which enchanted the audience.

43 A man full of rage and anger. However, this term should not be linked to the political faction of the *arrabbiati* present in Florence during the Medici's era, since this political "party" was related to papal Rome and Ludovico il More, duke of Milan. They contrasted the Medici family but, at the same time, they were anti-savonarolian because they fought for an aristocratic republic. Therefore, their historical rivals were the Piagnoni, those who were filo-savonarolian.

44 "Lamb" in Spanish.

age, as a face, as a gaze. Savonarola died a *bella morte,*[45] and when you spoke, I told myself: "This man is so right! Yes!"

However, your words did not say anything about what most fascinated *me* about this man, what happened to *me* during the last fifty days of reading him. Because his writings, conceived in the moment when Savonarola was confronted with his own death, that had the greatest influence—which destiny gave me to verify, not in Tuscany, but beyond the Arno, beyond the Apennine Mountains, beyond the Pyrenees, beyond the Ocean—were those written in his last days. Already in 1939, Vicente Beltrán de Heredia[46] documented the influence of these writings on the reformation under Cisneros[47] in Spain, on the convents of Toledo, on the Colegio de San Gregorio de Valladolid.

For some reason this remains forgotten: this was a Savonarolian convent, a place where the *via espiritual* and the *Libro de la Oracíon y meditation* by Luis de Granada[48] were conceived.[49] But that is my fault! I'm the curator–as

45 *Bella morte*. This expression means literally "beautiful death" and it recalls a long tradition which the Middle Ages categorized in the title *De bono modo moriendi*, an invitation to practice the *ars moriendi*: cfr. Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present*, 1974. Illich knew Ariès quite well (cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 75-77). It is also very interesting that Claudio Leonardi, who was in Pistoia too, in his book *Medioevo latino. La cultura dell'Europa cristinana*, 2004, entitled one of his chapters on Savonarola: "L'arte del ben morire di Girolamo Savonarola", pp. 693-702. Cfr. in: *Una città e il suo profeta. Firenze di fronte a Savonarola. Atti del convegno internazionale* (*Firenze, 10–13 dicembre)*, 1998, pp. 119-128.

46 Vicente Beltrán de Heredia (1885-1973) was a famous scholar at the University of Salamanca who studied deeply the spiritual currents, which wanted a reformation of the Spanish Christendom: *Historia de la reforma de la provincia de España (1450-1550)*, Roma, 1939; *Las corrientes de espiritualidad entre los dominicos de Castilla durante la primera mitad del siglo XVI*, in: Miscelánea Beltrán de Heredia, 1973, Pt. 3, p. 519-671. He also wrote on Antonio de Nebrija: *Nebrija y los teólogos de San Esteban de principios del siglo XVI*, in: *Ciencia Tomista* 191/4 (1932), pp. 37-65.

47 Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436-1517).

48 Luis de Granda (1504-1588).

49 *Libro de la Oracion y Meditacion: en el qual fe trata de la Consideracion de los principales mysterios de nuestra Fe, con otras cosas provechosas*, Compuesto por Fray

you may know[50]–together with Valentina Borremans of this fantastic enterprise: 98 percent of printed books, pamphlets and stamped stuff with the ecclesiastical *imprimatur*, from 1820 onwards, has never been catalogued. They are considered ecclesiastical byproducts. And we catalogued hundred thousand of them and we inscribed them on microfilm.[51] But, again, my fault! I never collected, until now, the works by Luis de Granada and never took note of Savonarola's influence in these books. Bataillon,[52] by simplifying it, sees in Luis de Granada the synthesis of Erasmus[53] and the theology of the cross of Fra Girolamo.

Let us admit that this can take us a bit too far away. I have shown you this citation [to a homily by] the great bishop Sergio Mendez Arceo[54]of Cuernavaca, who had reformed his

Luys de Granada de la Orden de sancto Domingo. Impresso en Salamanca, en casa de Andrea de Portonaris,1554.

50 I suppose Illich is still referring to Father Verde.

51 Cfr. *History of Religiosity in Latin America, c. 1830–1970*, The CIDOC Collection, Edited by Valentina Borremans with the assistance of Ivan Illich. The difficulties endorsed in this path were clarified by Ivan Illich in a letter to Paolo Prodi, dated 15 January 1970, where he recalls how the ecclesiastic power sabotaged his work by burning important documetns: "Quanto alla questione della ricerca che dobbiamo facilitare in Amercia del Sud vado da fregatura in fregatura. Il cardinale di Lima ha fatto bruciare la stanza dove avevo dei libri [d]a collettare (aveva bisogno di un ufficio per la Caritas) e le suore della compagnia di S. Paolo, su ordine di un prete americano a Lima, hanno bruciato 4 casse grandi nelle quali avevo raccolto la collezione più completa di lettere pastorali, giornaletti di chiesa etc. del Perù dell'ultimo secolo: dicendo che era pericoloso che questo cada nelle mie mani! Dallo stomaco monta verso il cuore una certa stanchezza»", in: Prodi, *op. cit.*, 2016, pp. 270-271.

52 Marcel Bataillon (1895-1977), French Hispanist who mainly worked on Hispanic spirituality in 16th Spain; cfr. *Erasme et l'Espagne: recherches sur l'histoire spirituelle du XVI siècle*, Paris: Droz; Bordeaux: Feret & Fils, 1937; *Sur la diffusion des oeuvres de Savonarola en Espagne et en Portugal (1500-1560)*, in: Mélanges de philologie d'histoire et de littérature offerts a Joseph Vianey, París, 1934. This work by Bataillon is cited by de Heredia, *Historia de la reforma de la provincia de España (1450-1550)*, Roma, 1939, p. 128.

53 Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536).

54 Sergio Mende Arceo (1907-1992) was the bishop of Cuernavaca from 1953 to 1983, and he supported Ivan Illich, when in 1961 he founded the CIDOC. An intellectual double-portrait of Arceo and Illich is found in: Francine du Plessix Gray, *op. cit.*,

dioceses. In it, I found, looking for Savonarola, this phrase by the seventh bishop of Cuernavaca, as [Mendez] used to call himself: "Decirle a un obispo que es profeta no es añadirle nada. ¡Es decir que es obispo!"[55] Take note of how the Church can deal with someone, even if he is a good man like Mendez, who studied the influence of Erasmus on the first ecclesiastical foundations in Latin America! He doesn't use the name *Giovanni*, but he says the same thing regarding prophecy.

For my part, when I said "Girolamo, this time you amazed me, this time you caught me,"[56] it was because of this beautiful sentence from the *Miserere*[57] about his very last day when all things have turned into torment and bitterness: "Let the abyss of misery be absorbed by the abyss of mercy."[58] I meditated [on this sentence], and I say that in a very personal way, every day over the last two and a half months.

Let me immediately talk about the meeting of the three brothers[59] in case someone does not know this last

1970, pp. 233-322.

55 Kindly translated by the help of Jose-Antonio from Madrid, who translated and reported as follows: "To tell a bishop that he is a prophet is not to add anything to him. It is saying that he is a bishop". Illich borrowed this sentence from *Compromiso cristiano y liberación*, Mexico, Centro de estudos ecuménicos, 1985, Vol. 2, p. 366. Large excerpts of this text are found in Illich's note, in: *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished), pp. 158-159.

56 Cfr. fn. 35.

57 Cfr. Vulgata Latina, Ps. 50: 3.

58 Illich is quoting from *L'Ultimo Scritto Di Fra Girolamo Savonarola Il Salmo* Miserere Mei Deus *Commentato In Carcere*, Milano, ed. Lodovico Ferretti, 1901, p. 18; the Latin text: "abyssus peccatorum invocat abyssum gratiarum. Maior est abyssus misericordiae quam abyssum miseriae. Absorbeat ergo abyssus abyssum. Absorbeat abyssus misericordiae abyssum miseriae. (Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam) Non secundum misericordiam hominum: quae parva est. Sed secundum tuam: quae magna est: quae immensa est: quae incomprehensibilis est. Quae omnia peccata in immensum excedit", in: *Fratris Hieronymi Savonarolae Ferrariensis Expositiones in psalmos*, 1517, Venetiis, XVIII [v].

59 Savonarola was hanged, and his body burned, on May 23, 1498, in Florence, together with him, Fra Domenico Buonvicini (1450ca.-1498) and Fra Silvestro Maruffi (1461-1498).

day! I cite directly from Ridolfi's book.[60] [Savonarola] speaks [to] Fra Domenico: "It has been revealed to me that you desire to be burned alive. Know you not that it is not permitted to choose one's manner of dying, but that you must joyfully accept that which is prepared for you by God? Who knows whether you will be able to bear that which is made ready for you?"[61] And then he turns to Fra Silvestro, about whom another text says: "qui timidissimum omnium [...] futuraeque mortis horrore tremebundus"[62] –this is what the text says–, and tells him that he [Savonarola] knows already that he, [Fra Silvestro] wants to declare their innocence before being burned alive, and says to him: "And it has been revealed to me that you intend before dying to protest to the people that we are innocent. You must not do that, for not even Christ proclaimed his innocence from the cross."[63] And both kneel and Frate Domenico starts [to say]: "Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum."[64] Fi-

60 Roberto Ridolfi (1899-1991) was an important writer and poet, writing books on Machiavelli, Guicciardini and Savonarola. He edited the major biography of the monk in 1952, which quickly became canonical, even if a certain hagiographical tone displeased certain people. As already said, (cfr. fn. 35) Illich used Ridolfi's book *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola*, terza edizione, Sansoni editore, 1974. An English translation of this text is available as *The Life of Giovanni Savonarola* by R. Ridolfi, translated by Cecil Greyson, New Work, Alfred Knopf, 1959. The following direct quotes are taken from this edition.

61 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, p. 267; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 397.

62 Here Illich is citing from the first biography on Savonarola, written few years after his death by Gioan Francesco II Pico della Mirandola (1469-1533), nephew of the more famous Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), but published only in the 17th century in France: *Vita R. P. Fr. Hieronymi Savonarolae Ferrariensis, Pariis, sumptibus Ludovici Billaine*, 1674, Vol. II, p. 90: "qui timidissimum omnium ad id usque temporis fuerat, futuraeque mortis horrore tremebundus." Illich notes this Latin phase in his notes too: *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished), p. 163, fn. 17. Illich's cited Latin text-part can be translated as follows: "... he, who was so deeply frightened by everything [...], was quivering because of the horror of coming death".

63 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, pp. 267-268; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 397:

64 Here Illich quotes from Savonarola, *op. cit.*, 1679, p. 90; cfr. *Vulgata Clementina*, Ps. 132: 1: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (in: Saint James Bible, Ps. 133, 1).

nally, he leaves and those sent by the General, come "to strip them off the habit [and Savonarola] "flevit"[65]!In Mexico we are used to this, because the hidalgos in Morelos–[the federal Mexican] state in which I live–still during the Revolution of 1820, had their internal organs, which were consecrated before killing them, cut away.

And, finally, comes the declaration that they are "heretics and schismatics"[66], in front of [Francesco] Romolino[67], who not only condemns them, but who also says: "It pleases His Holiness to free you from the pains of Purgatory, giving you plenary indulgence for your sins, and restoring you to your pristine innocence. Do you accept this? And the [heretical and schismatic] friars piously bowed their heads and signified their consent."[68]

What happened here? I cannot ever forget these three bowed heads. Expelled, separated from the community, they accept the indulgence, which the *boia*[69] –you say *boia*, right? – grants them. They die testifying in name of the Church. I believe that this attitude is the attitude by which I can indicate the direction towards which I have tried to act over

65 Savonarola "shed tears" when they strip him off his "holy habit". Here Illich quotes from Savonarola, *op. cit.*, 1674, pp. 89-90: "In descendendis autem Patatij gradibus, spoliatus Religionis habitu, quem ubi comprehendit minibus, flevit, eum se olim appetivisse cupidè, & immaculatum hactenus custodivisse testatus"; cfr. Ridolfi, op. cit., 1974, p. 399: "O abito santo, quanto t'ho desiderato! Dio mi ti tenne, e insino a ora t'ho conservato immacolato; e ora io non ti lascerei, ma tu mi sei tolto!"; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, p. 269.

66 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, p. 265; cfr. Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 393.

67 Francesco Romolino [alias Francisco de Remolins, 1462-1518], future bishop of Fermo (1503), was the head of the papal legates, sent to Florence by Pope Alexander VI Borgia (1403-1503) to judge Savonarola.

68 Ridolfi, *op. cit.*, 1959, p. 270; cfr. Rodolfi, *op. cit.*, 1974, p. 401.

69 Executioner.

these thirty-five years of apophatic ecclesiology.[70] [With their bowed heads] they prophesize[71]–but not with their promises, not with the threat of torments[72] and not even with their suffering[73]–the face of Jesus, which they disclose and which is

70 Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 65: "When I studied theology, my preferred subject was ecclesiology, which is the scientific study of that particular community which the Church conceives as its ideal, and has since the fourth century. It is the first attempt to study a social phenomenon which is not the state, nor the law, as such. Ecclesiology, therefore, can be taken, in a funny but very real way, as the predecessor of sociology but with a tradition about twenty times as long as sociology since Durkheim. Now I was very much interested in the traditions and the disputes about this phenomenon, which really exists only in Western culture, of a community which claims to be as all-embracing, as catholic, as the state — or what civil law governs — and yet claims to be independent from it." Friends like Lee Hoinacki, Barry Sanders, Domenico Farias and Jean Robert have pointed out how the 'apophatic theology' is the central core of Illich's spirituality; cfr. *The Challenges of Ivan Illich. A Collective Reflection*, ed. by Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham, New York, State University Press, 2002, p. 12, p. 68, p. 100, p. 178.

71 The Greek word προφητεία reminds us that a prophet not simply "says something" but it always "says something in front of someone": you prophesize only *coram Deo*, in front of the face of God.

72 Illich is here following, more or less, the division of prophecy in three main groups, following Thomas Aquinas: *prophetia praedestinationis*, *prophetia prescientiae*, *prophetia comminationis*, in: *De Veritate*, q. 12, a. 10; Summa Theologie, II^a-II_{ae}, q. 174, a. 1.

73 Usually, the original Italian term *gesto* is translated with "action" because in Latin, the word *gestum* or *gesta* in its plural form indicates exactly what in English resembles "deeds" or "actions". However, Giorgio Agamben has also pointed out that Varro, who: "taking up the Aristotelian distinction between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, doing and acting, introduces among them a third type of action (*tertium genus agendi*), which he expresses by means of the verb *gerere*. […] Those who *gerunt* are not limited to acting, but in the very act in which they carry out their action, they at the same time stop it, expose it, and hold it at a distance from themselves" (*Karman. A Brief Treatise on Action, Guilt, and Gesture*, Stanford University Press, California, 2017, pp. 83-84). Therefore, Agamben continues: "Gesture is not in fact simply lacking a work but instead defines its own special activity through the neutralization of the works to which it is linked as means" (ibidem., p. 84). Sajay Samuel has brilliantly pointed out how the specific term "gesture" becomes, in Illich's spiritual horizon, equivalent to his notion of "suffering", which for him was the *gestum gestorum*, the main gesture among all other gestures. Cfr. Illich: "I believe in the art of suffering, in the art of dying, in the art of living, and, so long as it is in an austere and clearsighted way, in the art of enjoyment, the art of living it up" (in: *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, *The Testament of Ivan Illich* ed. by David Cayley, Toronto, Anansi, 1992, p. 189). Therefore, I translate the Italian term "gesto" with "suffering".

disclosed within them,[74] as the acceptance of powerlessness![75]

74 The *vultus Dei*, this supreme gift (donum) given to mankind though the mediation and incarnation of the Son, is also a gift which can be shared in the terms of *conspiratio*; Thomas Aquinas defines "gift" as follows: "… donum vocatur gratia gratis data, quia supra facultatem naturae, et supra meritum personae, homini conceditur, sed quia non datur ad hoc ut homo ipse per eam iustificetur, sed potius ut ad iustificationem alterius cooperetur, ideo non vocatur gratum faciens»" in: *Summa Theologiae*, II, q. 111. a. 1. [resp. dic.]. So, the "face of Jesus" is disclosed in the hearts of these monks not according to a *gratia gratus faciens*, which refers to martyrdom, but according to a *gratia gratis data*, which refers to prophecy. Cfr Illich's definition of "gratuity" (Umsonstigkeit); cfr. *The Rivers North of the Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich*, Toronto, Anansi, 2005, p. 227.

75 I'm translating *impotenza* here with "powerlessness" according to the distinction made by Illich himself few weeks later in his interview with David Cayley in Mai 1997; cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 182: "What I want to cultivate, in myself, and with friends, is not impotence but powerlessness, a powerlessness which does not forego awareness of the here and now between the Jew and the Samaritan". The Italian translation is in trouble here because it translates "impotence" with *impotenza* and "powerlessness" with *assenza di potere* (cfr. *I fiumi a nord del future. Testamento racconto da David Cayley*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2005, p. 177), while the German translation is more precise by translating "impotence" as *Unvermögen* and "powerlessness" as *Ohnmacht* (cfr. *In den Flüssen nördlich der Zukunft. Letzte Gespräche über Religion und Gesellschaft mit David Cayley*, C.H. Beck, 2020, p. 208). I suggest translating to Italian "impotence" with *impossibilità di potere* and "powerlessness" with *assenza di potere* or, directly, with *impotenza*. Illich in 1991 uses the German term *Ohnmacht* in order to delineate his own position toward the term "Responsibility", in: Ivan Illich, *Die Substantivierung des Lebens im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert -eine Heraus-forderung für das 21. Jahrhundert*, in: *Was macht den Menschen krank? 18 kritische Analysen*, Springer Basel AG, hersg. Von Klaus Jork etc., p. 226: „Was die Epoche seit der Kristallnacht bestimmt, ist die anwachsende Selbstverständlichkeit des bodenlos Bösen, das Hitler und Stalin noch vertuscht haben, das aber heute zum Thema für die gehobene Diskussion über Atom, Gen, Gift, Gesundheit und Wachstum geworden ist. Das sind Übel und Verbrechen, vor denen wir sprachlos sind. Ungleich Tod, Pest und Teufel, lassen sich diese Übel nicht nützen. Sie sind unmenschlicher Ordnung. Sie zwingen uns zur Ohnmacht, Hilflosigkeit, Gewaltlosigkeit, *ahimsa.* An diesem Bösen können wir leiden, wir können an ihm zerbrechen, aber es nicht deuten. Erleiden kann es nur der, der in Geduld sich und seine Freunde gut leiden kann. Unser «Nein!» ist also himmelweit entfernt von jedem ‚Ja' zu den Begleiterscheinungen des Fortschrittes"; cfr. *Gesundheit in eigener Verantwortung: Nein Danke!* in: Ivan Illich, Selbstbegrenzung. Eine politische Kritik der Technik, Beck'sche Reihe, 1998, pp. 164-175.

In 1980, during the Tagung der Evangelischen Akademie in Bad Boll, Illich said about his concept of powerlessness: „Irgendwie wird Ohmacht als etwas angesehen was überwunden und ausgeschaltet werden muß. Ich glaube, Ohnmacht überwindet man dadurch, daß man leiden lernt […] und der Mensch, der nicht leiden können will, ist typisch der Mensch, der an den Fortschritt glaubt"(cit. in: *Gruppen und Klassen-Menschen und Bürokraten-Lebensstile und Massenmärkte*, in: Protokolldienst Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll Vol. 13, 1980, pp.13-26, p. 18).

Illich already in his essay *The Eloquence of Silence* spoke about this: "It is the mys-

Now, our meeting here was not only–as I believed–about prophecy but also about the *relation* between tyranny and prophecy […].[76] I don't know if –because of this invitation you made me–what I started to grasp here with great surprise can be considered *doctrina communis*[77] or not. But in the sense that the prophet is an individual who appears somewhere in Palestine, and a community is formed just because there is a prophet —it is not possible any more to be a prophet today. You[78] said the same thing—excuse me if I'm exaggerating another time and I drive you crazy: let us say that you are very patient with me, but you gave me the possibility to say what I want—something like the tyranny of what [today] is called "need", something which was unimaginable for Savonarola, not to mention Amos.[79]

What am I trying to say? Father Verde, forgive me for the way I talk here––I will write it down in a more appropriate manner.[80] There is this Palestinian –no, you don't say Palestinian, you say Samaritan, but he is [in fact] a Palestin-

terious silence through which the Lord could descend into the silence of hell, the acceptance without frustration of a life, useless, and wasted on Judas, a silence of freely willed powerlessness through which the world was saved. Born to redeem the world, Mary's Son had died at the hands of His people, abandoned by His friends and betrayed by Judas whom He loved but could not save-silent contemplation of the culminating paradox of the Incarnation which was useless for the redemption of at least one personal friend", in: *Celebration of Awareness. A Call for Institutional Revolution*, Anchor's Books, 1971, p. 37.

76 At this point Illich interrupts his speech to ask if he still has fifteen or sixteen minutes to talk.

77 Common knowledge or opinion.

78 Here Illich is probably referring to Father Verde.

79 Amos, the third of the Twelve Minor Prophets in the Old Testament, and the second in the Greek *Septuaginta*.

80 Illich intended to write down, in Italian, together with Lee Hoinacki a more articulated version of this conference but, for one reason or another, this project was never completed. I thank Fabio Milana for this information.

ian–whose deed[81] Jesus[82] does not take as an answer to how I ought to behave towards my neighbor. That is the canonical interpretation of this passage, which we discovered when we once studied it in hundreds of cases. But rather the question is 'who is my neighbor'? [83] And Jesus says: "Who you want, who *you* choose!" By saying that, Jesus broke, in a certain way, the frame of decency. Zeus [was] Xenios[84] for the Greeks but not for the barbarians.[85] [But] Jesus made and, as in many other things–and I take this as a particular example–turned topsy-turvy the tradition of hospitality in such a way that I can actually *choose*! And what does the Church do in order to realize that? [It creates] the institution!

Confronted with that, I would like to be like Savonarola […].[86] The Church establishes the *xenodocheia* (ξενοδοχεῖα)

81 Cfr. fn. 74.

82 Cfr. Luke, 10: 25-37.

83 Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 50-51: "Jesus tells the story in response to the question of "a certain lawyer," that is, a man versed in the Law of Moses, who asks, "Who is my neighbor?" […] Once, some thirty years ago, I made a survey of sermons dealing with this story of the Samaritan from the early third century into the nineteenth century, and I found out that most preachers who commented on that passage felt that it was about how one ought to behave towards one's neighbor, that it proposed a rule of conduct, or an exemplification of ethical duty. I believe that this is, in fact, precisely the opposite of what Jesus wanted to point out. He had not been asked, how should one behave towards one's neighbor, but rather, who is my neighbor? And what he said, as I understand it, was, My neighbor is who I choose, not who I have to choose. There is no way of categorizing who my neighbor ought to be".

84 This was one of the titles given to Zeus in his mythical form of protector of the strangers of Hellenic tongue looking for refuge and shelter.

85 The Greek term *xénos*, which is usually translated as "stranger", indicates within the historic background of Classic Greece only the Greek-speaking stranger: an Athenian was a "stranger" to a Spartan, but both recognize the mutual belonging to the same "Greekness"; all the others were simply "barbarians". Therefore, *xénia*, the Greek term for "hospitality", is usually granted only to those belonging to the Hellenic cultural community. Cfr. Maria Elena De Luna, *La comunità linguistica fra alloglotti nel mondo greco. Da Omero a Senofonte*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 2003.

86 Here Illich stops and loudly complains about his personal physical state, but he never fails to reply ironically, even to himself: "my head is dizzy, I should receive some indulgences, but …". Illich laughs.

this extraordinary invention, the houses for the poor, for the miserable, an institution, which never existed in other parts of the world. And, immediately, John Chrysostom[87] replies, in the same year of the so-called Constantinian Peace[88]: "Don't do that! Otherwise, what characterizes a household, the threshold of a Christian, and the fact that there is a mattress and a bit of candle, in case Jesus should knock[89], will become obsolete."[90]

I must thank Jean Daniélou[91] who opened my eyes to this event, because he knew a Chinese person who was baptized. This guy went on a pilgrimage by foot from Peking to Rome; and he was always tolerated as a pilgrim and [always] found shelter when he still was in Asia; also, in the world of the Orthodox Church things still went for him in this way, but as soon as he reached Poland, people gave him money so that he could go to the house of pilgrims.

I take him to exemplify the idea that there is a need; that we are born into a society made of individuals who need services for a roof, who are in need [because] they are born

87 John Chrysostom (347 ca.- 407) was a Church Father and archbishop of Constantinople. For his eloquence he received the name *Chrysostomos*, the golden-tongued.

88 In 313 Constantine the Great issued the Edict of Milan, legalizing Christianity.

89 In the form of a stranger looking for a roof and shelter.

90 Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 54; Illich quotes the paraphrased citation of John Chrysostom from one of his homilies: *In acta apostolorum, homelia XLV, 3-6*, in: Patrologia Graeca (PG), Paris, Migne, 1862, Vol. 60, pp. 317-322, where we can read the central quote: «ποιήσει ἑαυτῷ ξενοδοχεῖον ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκίας: στῆσον ἐκεῖ κλίνην, στῆσον ἐκεῖ τράπεζαν καὶ λυχνίαν» (ibidem., p. 319), which translated means: "Make for yourself a shelter in your own house: set up a bed there, set up a table there and a candlestick". Already in 1987 Illich in *Hospitality and Pain*, presented at the McCormick Theological Seminar, Chicago, used this passage to point how "Some Church Fathers claim that this [institutionalization] became necessary because the ardor of Christian charity cooled. Chrysostom speaks for others, urging all the faithful of his community to return to the old ways, keeping ready in their homes, beds of straw, food and candles for those who have no roof over their head"; cfr. Ivan Illich, *La perte des sens*, Fayard, 2004: L'origine chrétienne des services (1987) pp. 9-44.

91 Jean Daniélou (1905-1974), French Jesuit theologian; cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 54-55.

with [the] deficiency of knowledge, which only an institution can give. Some of you may know about my reflection for over forty-years on this theme: from where else does the *homo educandus* come? Cicero tells me: "Educat nutrix, docet, vero instruit magister."[92] And [if] I give a look into the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*[93], it tells me and shows me that *educere* requires a feminine subject, till Tertullian's times. [The concept that] Christ's milk[94] –the supernatural revelation– cannot be obtained, unless by *docentia*, is transferred into a society which [then] develops the idea that everyone is in need of education.

Time is running out! My idea –let us say my intellectual experience–is to [discover], to dig in order to find out from where, historically, all these concepts, all these axiomatic notions, which are so characteristic of the West come from:

92 This quote comes not from Cicero but from Varro, who was quoted by the lexicographer Nonius Marcellus from the fourth century: "EDUCERE et EDUCARE hanc habent distantiam. Educere est extrahere; educare nutrire et provehere. Varro Cato vel de liberis educandis: educit enim obstetrix, educat nutrix, instituit paedagogus, docet magister" (*Noni Marcelli De compendiosa doctrina*, emandavit et adnotavit Lucianus Mueller, Pars II, Lipsiae, in aedibus B. G. Teubneri, 1884, p. 41).

93 Cfr. *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (TLL), Vol. 5, 2: pp.113-12: EDUCO.

94 Cfr. *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* by Caroline Walker Bynum, University of California Press, 1984. Already Saint Paul compares newly converted Christians to children that need to be nourished with milk and not with solid food (in: 1 Cor., 3: 2 and Heb. 5, 12-14); then Augustine directly talks about the *fidei lac*, the "milk of faith" (cfr. *Conf.* I, 1: "Exceperunt ergo me *consolationes* lactis humani, nec mater mea vel nutrices meae sibi ubera implebant, sed tu mihi per eas dabas alimentum infantiae secundum institutionem tuam et divitias usque ad fundum rerum dispositas»), and a Pseudo-Augustinian Text cites: «[Ecclesia] ramos suos in universam terram copia ubertatis extendit, profluentes largiter rivos latius expandit; unum tamen caput est et origo una, et una mater foecunditatis successibus copiosa. Illius foetu nascimur, illius lacte nutrimur, spiritu ejus animamur", in: Liber de unitate Ecclesiae, cap. 5 [Cyprian of Carthage], PL, Vol. 4, p. 502; cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 143-144.

from the *conjuratio*[95] to the image[96], from the idea of the text[97] to the possibility –let us say– […][98] of the criminalization of sin.[99] I find [that all this] is an effort by the Church to guarantee, to give [permanence], to make better than what the individual–who is the only who is actually called to do it– could do [by himself], and it creates the institution, which then becomes secularized. It is about the *corruptio optimi* –the grace– *quae est pessima.*[100]

95 This topic was studied by Illich under the influence of Paolo Prodi, who wrote a book on it: *Il sacramento del potere. Il giuramento politico nella storia costituzionale dell'Occidente*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1992.

96 Cfr. Ivan Illich, *Guarding the Eye in the Age of the Show*, in: RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics, Autumn, 1995, No. 28, pp. 47-61; Ivan Illich and Barbara Duden, *The Scopic Past and the Ethics of the Gaze. A Plea for the Historical Study of Ocular Perception*, German Translation: *Die skopische Vergangenheit Europas und die Ethik der Opsis. Plädoyer für eine Geschichte des Blickes und Blickens*, in: Historische Anthropologie, 3. Jahrgang, Heft 2, 1995, Böhlau Verlag Köln/Weimar /Wien, pp. 203-221.

97 Cfr. *In the Vineyard of the Text. A Commentary on Hugh's Didascalicon*, Chicago University Press, 1993.

98 Illich confesses that in this moment he is "sottosopra", "confused", "disorientated", "out of order".

99 Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 80-94.

100 "The corruption of the best is the worst". This phrase stands for the very heart of Illich's thought. He uses it without any further references for the first time in *Pain and Hospitality* (1987): "This central reality of the West is marvelously expressed in the old Latin phrase: *Corruptio optimi quae est pessima* - the historical progression in which God's Incarnation is turned topsy-turvy, inside out. I want to speak of the mysterious darkness that envelops our world, the demonic night paradoxically resulting from the world's equally mysterious vocation to glory". Illich, *Part Moon Part Travelling Salesman: Conversation with Ivan Illich*, 1989, The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: "Dawson has a passage where he says the church is Europe and Europe is the church, and I say Yeah! *Corruptio optimi pessima*. We attempt to ensure, to guarantee, to regulate the revelation that at any moment we might recognize, even when we are Palestinians, that there is a Jew lying in the ditch whom I can take in my arms, embrace him"; cfr. *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, Anansi, 1992, p. 242. In 1993, this phrase is used again by Illich in his *Hommage à Jacques Ellul*. Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 213: "Since the 1970s, always growing stronger, this has remained a motive of my research. Powerful and unprecedented ideas, brought through Christianity and through the Gospel into Western history, have been perverted into normative notions of a cruelty, of a horrifying darkness, which no other culture has ever known. The Latin adagium, *corruptio optimi pessima* — there's nothing worse than the corruption of the best — became a theme in my reading and reflection". Cfr. Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 56, p. 180, p.

And only if I look to the history of the axioms of the West without refusing to see it as a substantial part of the history of the Church, as the [history] of the assurance by Church, the [history] of institutionalization by the Church, can I reach the point from where I can grasp the Abyss in which we are today! This is because, after the last thirty or forty years of fighting for development, only now, finally, do people understand what "development" really means: "In the West as it is in Heaven"! My students didn't know where this phrase comes from—only seventeen of them knew the *Pater noster.*[101] [But] In this condition I see not Evil but the

207, p. 2018. It is difficult to define exactly the source of this quotation. Although its meaning is present in many classical authors like Plato (Rep. 6, 495b) and Aristotle (Eth. Nic. 1150a [7]), its concise form is taken from Thomas Aquinas, who commends a Latin version of Aristotle: "sicut regnum est optimum reginem, ita tyrannis est pessima corruptio regiminis" (Sum. Theo. I^a-II_{ae}, q. 105, a. 1, arg. 5). Giuseppe Mansi (1607-1697), archbishop of Lucca, is according to my knowledge the first, who quotes this adagio in its proper form, linking it to corruption as a medical term: "Vulgaris est ille medicinae aphorismus: "*Corruptio optimi pessima*", et ideo sicut manna adeo turpiter putrefiebat, ut exinde nauseabundi scaturient vermes, eodem modo quanto benignior suique liberalior est divina bonitas, ita si illa abundamur et contemnamus, insicuriora supplicia convertetur", in: Bibliotheca moralis, tom. III: [De morte, discursus XIX, 4], Moguntiae, sumptibus Joannis Petri Zubrodt, et haered. Joannis Baptistae Schoenwetteri, 1673, pg. 307. However, Ennio de San Ignazio (1630-1719) links our adagio to Gregorius Magnus and Thomas Aquinas: "Primo itaque gravitas essentialis peccati petitur ex magnitudine boni, quod per peccatum corrumpitur, juxta illud Philosophi 8. Ethic. 3. "Pessimum est quod contrarium optime". Unde axioma: *Corruptio optimi pessima*. Et ideo peccata spiritualia multo graviora esse carnalibus, uno ore pronuntiant sanctissimi patres, signanter Gregorius [Magnus] 33 Mor. II et divus Thomas [Aquinas] Sum. Theo. I^a-II_{ae}, qu. 73, art. 6», in: Ethica amoris, tomus primus de generalibus principiis, amoris et morum: Pars secunda de generalibus principiis amoris et morum, Liber X: Amor inordinatus, sive de peccatis, caput XIX, Venetiis ex typographia Balleoniana, 1771, pg. 276. The sources cited by Ennio de San Ignation, however, don't report the exact quote. Beside Illich, one other theologian, but this time a protestant one, who quotes this sentence is Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977): "There is nothing human which cannot be perverted or falsified. And indeed, we find that the higher a thing, the worse its perversion and falsification—*corruptio optimi pessima.* The devil apes God" (*The Heart. Human and Devine Affectivity* by Dietrich von Hildebrand (first ed. 1977), ST. Augustine's Press, South Bend, 2007, p. 16). Illich could have been inspired by his book.

101 By *perverting* the famous line from the Lord's Prayer –On Earth as it is in Heaven– Illich exemplifies the *perversion* of the West. Apparently, most of his students didn't recognize the obvious textual allusion, when in German he provocatory said:

Horror[102] [and] the consequences of the sin in which I live—which takes away my breath.

Yes, I say it! There is a friend, who you all know. We were close –[I'm speaking of] Alex Langer[103]– and when I knew about his death, I thought I knew where he must have hanged himself, but when I was told: "No, no [it happened] elsewhere", I said [to myself]: "Thanks God!", because it was there that we talked exactly on this topic.[104] I mention Alex to you because he is one of my many friends–I call them *friends* and not students–who had understood Evil in its mysterious aspect, that is Evil as *mysterium iniquitatis*,[105] the mystery of

"So im Himmel so auch *im Westen*". Illich gave a talk about the *perversion* of the Gospel within medical terms already in Bologna, 24 October 1998 with the striking title: "Non indurci in tentazione della diagnosi, [ma] liberaci dalla ricerca della salute", or in English "Lead us not into Diagnosis, but deliver us from the Pursuit of Health".

102 How not to think about the last phrases in Joseph Conrad's book *Heart of Darkness* (1899): "The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. "The horror! the horror!"?

103 Alexander Langer (1946-1995). Writer, politician, Christian: he was Illich's friend since 1985; born on the watershed of languages in Süd-Tirol/Alto-Adige, he was well aware of the problems of identities in a globalizing world. A very touching portrait of Illich made by Langer can be found in a collection of essays*: Il viaggiatore leggero: scritti 1961-1995*, Palermo, Sellerio editore, 2011, pp. 98-102 (this article was firstly published on *La Nuova Ecologia*, 19 October 1985). In 1988, Langer and Illich both participated in the first edition of the "Fiera delle Utopie Concrete" at Città di Castello. Here Illich was talking about the four elements. Langer remembers his first meeting with Illich in Bozen, 15.06.1985, in a brief article written and published in Geis-Maier-Kalender 1990; Langer's speech of 1985 had the title: *Alpine Mißverständnisse um Fortschritt und Widerstand gegen Modernisierung*. This article was later inserted in the *Liber amicorum*, a single-printed book in honor for Illich's 70th birthday.

104 Illich is here thinking of his last meeting with Langer in Bozen. Fabio Milana kindly told me that according to Edi Rabini, Langer's secretary, Illich with Barbara Duden, traveling to Germany, made a stop in Bozen, and tried to convince Alex to retire from politics and join his studying group of friends, insistently! Langer' body was found the day after his death, 03.07.1995, hanging from an apricot tree, surrounded by the beautiful landscape of Pian dei Giullari, which can be translated as "the plain of *fools*". Like Saint Francis of Assisi, Langer was, in a secular way, a *giullare di Dio*, a fool of God.

105 The concept of *mysterium iniquitatis*, taken from Paul, *Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, 2: 7, translated in the Saint James Bible as "the mystery of iniquity" became a very important topic in Illich's later thought. Illich was particularly drawn to this

impiety. And I firmly believe that to look in someone else's eyes, by offering him what you see of him and permitting him to give you what he sees in you is the [only] way by which we can help each other to *not* hang ourselves.

Therefore, since we remain with the idea that we can further develop what you, [Father Verde] have so beautifully presented, which is that we can [actually] continue to talk about prophecy, we are perhaps –the Germans would say … Heidegger[106] [would] say– on the *Holzweg*.[107] [This] is the disciplined [and] serious offer of friendship which establishes

after reading again in April 1997 Sergio Quinzio's book, *Mysterium iniquitatis: le encicliche dell'ultimo papa*, Milano, Adelphi, 1995; cfr. Illich, *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished), pp. 166-173; Illich, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 205-206: "Before he died — we never got together physically, unfortunately — he sent me his little book about the mystery of God's failure, and about the difficulty of accepting the existence of a God who fails in his intentions and who has, as far as we can judge it, limits to his omnipotence". Quinzio died on 22 March 1996; however, it's not exactly true that Illich didn't met Quinzio because, according to Franco La Cecla, they both met in September 1980 in Montebello together with other great minds like Carlo Bo, Italo Mancini and Massimo Cacciari; cft. Franco La Cecla, *Ivan Illich e la sua eredità*, Milano, Medusa, 2013, p. 12.

106 This is one, if not the only one of very few references to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). According to Thierry Paquot (here I'm referring to the German edition of his book on Illich: *Ivan Illich. Denker und Rebell*, München, C. H. Beck, 2017, p. 41) Illich never wanted to discuss Heidegger's philosophy, since he found him personally a coward and philosophically, he couldn't stand his jargon-filled way of expressing himself; cfr. Thierry Paquot, Introduction à Ivan Illich, Paris, La Découverte, 2012.

107 Here illich is referring to Heidegger's book, *Holzwege*, Frankfurt am Main, V. Klostermann, 1950, translated in English with *Off the Beaten Track*. *Holzweg* is a very old German word in use since the Middle Ages (cfr. *Grimms Wörterbuch*, Leipzig, 1877, Bd. 10, p. 1784: HOLZWEG), originally designating the pathways within woods used to easily transport trees which were cut down. Until the 19th century, the German word *Holz* appointed both the wood as a forest and wood as the stuff as trees are made on. The English language still maintained this double meaning for the same word. But soon *Holzweg* turned to be used as a metaphor that indicated the falling apart from the way of righteousness and virtue. Dante, for example, finds himself in a "selva oscura/ che la diritta via era smarrita" (Inf. I, vv. 2-3). Still in modern German the phrase, *Auf dem Holzweg sein*, means "to be on the wrong path", "to be wrong", "to be in a dead-end". Heidegger tried to reshape the word in a more positive light. For him it referred to the path of his own philosophy. Illich tries to do the same, but in his own way: for him, we can say, the path of friendship is a *Holzweg*, because it is off the beaten track of modernity; to be on the *Holzweg* means for him *not* to follow the road that modernity design for us. For Illich a *Holzweg* is a path, not more than a trail, but never a street or a road.

an *us*: not [the kind of friendship] in which the "us" finds its flowering, but the one which enables us to see the truth, to have the courage to pick it up, to consider it as something possible, along the lines you have shown.

Father Verde, I thank you for the present you have given *me*! But I imagine that you gave it also to the others who are here, in whose name I would like to say thank you, to this extraordinary gathering of colleagues, both women and men, that made it possible to do [all this] and to all those, who spoke here, from whom I have learned [a lot]; even if some colleague told me: "All this is well-known!" [But] I did not know it, and I remain fascinated by it.
Thank you.

BENEATH SAVONAROLA'S NOSE: Ivan Illich's *prophetic gaze* against *the shadow of the future*

by Leonardo Christopher Eck Glenewinkel

"*οὐδεὶς προφήτης δεκτός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ πατρίδι αὐτοῦ*".[1]

Pistoia, Sala Maggiore, Palazzo Comunale, May 24, 1997, Saturday evening: an old man, who looks back on his destiny "as a wandering Jew *and* Christian pilgrim",[2] gives a speech on Gerolamo Savonarola, the great heretic saint of the Italian Renaissance, in front of a group of learned scholars and a few fellow friends. His Italian is rusty, but still colourful and poignant, fitting someone who once knew the language very well but is now out of practice; his long limbs energetically follow his big hands which give shape to invisible patterns of thought. On his right cheek a bulging tuberosity is obvious: according to him, not a sign of oncogenic illness, but rather an *Ungemach*, an old German name for something which is "out of joint".[3] His name is Ivan Illich. How did it come to be

1 Greek New Testament, Lc. 4: 24 (Cfr. Saint James Bible: "No prophet is accepted in his own country"). For the careful reader this epigraph should be read in correlation with Hugh of Saint Victors' famous quote: "… he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign land [*perfectus vero cui mundus totus exilium est*]" (in: *The* Didascalicon *of Hugh of St. Victor. A Medieval Guide of the Arts*, ed. by Jerome Taylor, Columbia University Press, 1961, p. 101). This idea of "being in the world without being of the world", so strongly relevant for the Christian tradition, was first codified in the *Epistle to Diognetus*: "They live in fatherlands of their own, but as aliens. They share all things as citizens and suffer all things as strangers. Every foreign land is their fatherland, and every fatherland a foreign land." (*The Epistle to Diognetus*. The Greek Text with Introduction, Translation and Notes by Henry G. Meecham, Manchester University Press, 1949, p. 81). Cfr. footnote 52 in this essay.

2 Ivan Illich/ David Cayley: *The Rivers North of Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich* ed. by David Cayley, Anansi, 2005, p. 147. Highlighted by me.

3 Cfr. *Grimms Deutsches Wörterbuch*: UNGEMACH, in: Bd. 11, III Abeilung, Leibzig,

Leonardo Christopher Eck Glenewinkel, eckgleneleo@aol.de
Glenewinkel, L. C. E.BENEATH SAVONAROLA'S NOSE: Ivan Illich's prophetic gaze against the shadow of the future. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 46-64.

that this man, who "become interested in Savonarola when [he] was a boy of thirteen or fourteen living in Florence with the enthusiasm one can have at that age for rebels",[4] opened this almost forgotten window to his past?

The *secular* occasion was a rather academic one: his old friend, the historian Paolo Prodi (1932-2016), had invited him to give the closing speech of a series of meetings, organized around the upcoming fifth centenary of Savonarola's death, burned at the stake in Florence, May 23, 1498. However, what this occasion brought up was something of a rather more *spiritual* nature. Emblematic of this deeper sensibility was the fact that when all the speeches of this occasional community of scholars were collected and published under the quite pompous title: *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia* [Savonarola. Democracy, Tyranny, Prophecy],[5] Illich's speech was not printed, and his name was simply mentioned as *pro forma*: "sezione quarta conclusive: presiede e conclude *Ivan* Illich".[6]

Of course, Illich, together with his friend and theologian Lee Hoinacki who was present at his speech in Pistoia,[7] had tried to set down a more structured form of it, but for one reason or another, they failed.[8] However, this failure must not only be explained by Illich's infirmity or lack of time. It was clear in the way the speech was set that a more antithetic

Verlag von S. Hirzel, 1936 pp. 758-766; the direct quotation is taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 1, sc. 5.

4 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 153.

5 *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia* a.c.d. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 1998.

6 Garfagnini, *op. cit.*, 1998, p. xv.

7 He was cited directly by Illich during his speech, under the Latin version of his name: Ceslaus/ Lee.

8 I thank Fabio Milana for this information, during our email exchange about this subject, January 2025.

form–compared to all the other academic speeches delivered during this meeting–could not be conceived. Illich talked to his audience, his speech was very personal, full of anecdotes, and *incarnated* the topic he was lecturing about.

And *Jvan*, as Illich's name was curiously written in the mentioned miscellanea, knew it: he knew that whenever he held a public speech, he was speaking with an *alien*, but never alienated, voice. In his later life, he always perceived himself "as a xenocryst",[9] a metaphor for a stony structure, which is washed away over the millennia and filled up with new magmatic material with only its original crystal-form left,[10] or as a "bird-of-paradise", the kind of birds that do not sing nor chirp but croak.[11] Illich's thoughts were, indeed, croaked and not chirped precisely because they were not tuned to any common ideological mainstream. So, he was perfectly coherent with himself, when he announced, "this foolishness, this foolish idea to conclude a meeting of great philologists, historians of philosophy etc, with an *intermezzo*, a thematic reflection, a bit like a clown who ends a great theatrical performance".[12] Here Illich picks up consciously the classic frame of the Christian

9 Ivan Illich: *Philosophy... Artefacts... Friendship* (March 23, 1996); here I refer to the text of the Italian translation of this speech, contained in the book: *In cammino sullo spartiacque. Scritti su Ivan Illich*, a.c.d. Adalberto Arrigoni, Emanuele Morandi, Riccardo Prandini, Milano, Mimesis, 2017, p. 73.

10 Oswald Splenger is, according to my knowledge, the first one to use this metaphor to circumscribe his notion of "pseudo-morphosis [Pseudomorphose]", in: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgesichte*, München, C. H. Beck Verlag, Vol. 2, 1922, p. 227.

11 Ivan Illich, *Philosophische Ursprünge der grenzenlosen Zivilisation*, in: *Grenzen-los? Jedes System braucht Grenzen – aber wie durchlässig müssen diese sein?*, hrsg. von Ernst Ulrich von Weizsäcker, Springer, 2014, pp. 202-211.

12 From now on, all the direct citations from Illich's speech are going to be set in my translation of the original Italian version. Since there is no original text, I transcribed the speech, which is still available online as radio recording: https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/94189/savonarola-democrazia-tirannide-profezia-convegno-su-girolamo-savonarola?i=2073054.

fool,[13] *stultus in Deo*, and shrouded by this *dramatis persona,* he tried to display Savonarola's life in his last days as "a model attitude towards the Church, as well as the character of a man who knew in an extraordinarily beautiful way how to die".[14] But first things first.

Thanks to Illich's personal notes,[15] it is possible to reconstruct part of the intellectual journey which brought him to Pistoia. On April 22, 1997, Illich notes: "The pamphlet describing the Meeting in Pistoia just arrived".[16] The meeting in Italy took place on the 23 and 24 of May of the same year. In June, Illich already flew to Ocotopec, Mexico, where for two weeks he started his famous interview with David Cayley, which later became the raw material for the book *The Rivers*

13 The Clown as *Stultus in Deo*: cfr. "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" (Saint Jemes Bible, Cor. I, 1: 22). Already in *Tools of Conviviality* Illich points out how Clowns, Poets and Prophets deeply relay on each other: "Poets and Clowns have always risen up against the oppression of creative thought by dogma. They expose literal-mindedness with metaphor. They demonstrate the follies of seriousness in a framework of humor. Their intimate wonder dissolves certainties, banishes fears, and undoes paralysis. The prophet can denounce creeds and expose superstitions and mobilize persons to use their lights and wits. Poetry, intuition, and theory can offer intimations of the advance of dogma against wit that may lead to a revolution in awareness" (*Tools of Conviviality*, Heyday Books, Berkely, 1973, pp. 60-61). This thin red line of the "*stultus in deo* topic" reappears in his open letter to Helmut Becker, 19. November 1992, *The Loss of World and Flesh*: "The Russian and Greek world also offered the possibility to become not a monk but a holy fool, and for the rest of life cadge with dogs and beggars in the atrium of a Church" (here I quote the English translation made by Muska Nagel and Barbara Duden). The Latin term *stultitia* expresses what Illich calls *foolishness* (cfr. in: *The Rivers North of the Future. The Testament of Ivan Illich*, Anansi, 2005, pp. 57-58, p. 170). This foolishness is deeply embedded in European history from the holy fools of Byzantium to the works of Saint Francis of Assisi, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Ludovico Ariosto, Torquato Tasso, Michel de Montaigne, Willlliam Shakespeare, Giordano Bruno, Miguel de Cervantes, up to Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, only to name few of them. Here, *ex imo cordis*, I thank Alice Musso for having me shown how Prince Myškin, Dostoevsky's great character, owns a rightful place in this genealogy.

14 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 153.

15 Ivan Illich, *In the Mirror of the Past III* (unpublished); the numeration follows the one present in the documents displayed online by the Archive of the Stiftung CONVIVIAL: https://www.convivial.de/illich-archiv.

16 Illich, *Mirror III*, p. 147.

North of Future:[17]his impression of his Savonarola-journey in Pistoia left a vivid testimony in the twelfth chapter of that book.[18] Interestingly, already in his notes, Illich points out that he intended to use his gathered material about Savonarola to start up a larger editorial enterprise, including his interview with Cayley:

> In my speech on Savonarola, I just might succeed to avoid the use of the etymon "prophecy"; I doubt that I will succeed. What I want to do in preparation for Cayley: clarify in my own mind HOW i.e. *novo modo* I must speak when I correct the Chicago speeches on *nova* such as pain, hospitality, powers, for publication. Therefore, I am not worried of losing time by throwing a quick glance around the panorama which shows the sceneries within which "prophecy" was used.[19]

Within this tiny chorological window, from mid-April to the end of June, Illich presumably tried to develop a concentrated view of his own ideas. And what began as an inquiry into the conceptual historicity of prophecy ended as the testimony of friendship. In other words, Illich's intention was to mirror himself in Savonarola's shadow, which he evokes like a good necromancer[20] from the Realm of the Dead, but not to become like him: he wanted to feel the distance between someone who could still bear the name of the prophet and himself who acknowledged that "the time of prophecy lies behind us. The only chance now lies in our taking this vocation as that of the friend".[21] Illich understood that exercising the rule of

17 Cfr. Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. xvi.

18 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 153-156.

19 Illich, *Mirror III*, p. 148.

20 Cfr. *In Conversation with Ivan Illich*, Anansi, 1992, pp. 238-239.

21 Illich, /Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 170.

a prophet was not only culturally but also historically illegitimate, but from the impossibility to be a prophet comes the possibility to call upon a new vocation of prophecy: the *vocation of friendship*. He claimed that the renunciation of the rule of the prophet in history does not preclude us from the vocation of prophecy, so long as this prophecy is taken up as the vocation of friendship. This is what Illich tried to tease out during this period, and he worked so intensely on himself that for the rest of his life he never turned back to Savonarola and the idea of prophecy. For himself, he was done with Savonarola not because he would overlook him, but because he was saturated by him.

In April 1997 Illich made a summary in his notes of his current research, organizing it in four clusters of so called "heavyweight-words":

> I am sorely tempted to put "prophecy" into a tight epistemic bracket. Three times already I have picked up the scent of "HeavyweightWords" with an almost 360degree angle of meaning. The first I dealt with in "Verwirrung". The second grew into "Plastikwörter". The third is growing from "Vineyard" into "Textus". With "prophecy", I am on the trail of a fourth TYPE[22].

These clusters showed Illich's intellectual journey until this point. With the German term *Verwirrung*, translatable by "confusion", "bewilderment", even "disorientation", he tried to catch the historic and cultural roots of Man's *alienation* within Modernity. Under this term, it is possible to understand most of Illich so called "second phase", as Barbara Duden pointed out: "The second half of his working life has thus been rendered a blank page, a map without features, on which two islands unexpectedly break up an expanse of empty space, his

22 Illich, *Mirror III*, p. 147.

books *Gender* (1981) and *In the Vineyard of the Text* (1991)".[23] Since "the loss of vernacular gender is the decisive condition for the rise of capitalism and a life-style that depends on industrially produced commodities",[24] *Gender* is the book which traces this *Verwirrung* back to its founding moment when "the regime of scarcity" opposes "the reign of gender". The second cluster of heavyweight-words is related to the notion of *plastic words*, introduced to Illich by the German linguist Uwe Pörksen.[25] The third cluster refers to the historic moment, when the book, within the history of literacy, was transformed from a *vineyard* of words into a logical-structured *text*. This topic was extensively elaborated when Illich turned to his "friend",[26] Hugh of Saint Victor[27]. Finally, the fourth and last cluster-type deals with a quite unusual topic: *prophecy*. And it is at the crossroads of prophecy where Illich meets Savonarola.

Savonarola was a Dominican monk who was born in Ferrara in 1452 and burned at the stake in 1498 as a heretic by order of pope Alexander VI, *Borgia*. 1492 was a bloodthirsty year in Western civilisation. In January, the Islamic dwarf-kingdom of Granada was finally conquered by the Spaniards. In July, the Jews were pushed out of the newly unified Kingdom of Spain. In August, Christophorus Columbus started his colonial enterprise and Lorenzo il Mag-

23 Barbara Duden: *Ivan Illich - Jenseits von Medical Nemesis (1976) - auf der Suche nach den Weisen, in denen die Moderne das ‚Ich' und das ‚Du' entkörpert*. Symposion für Ivan Illich zum Abschied Universität Bremen, 7-8. Februar. 2003, von Barbara Duden; engl. Version: I*van Illich. Beyond Medical Nemesis (1976): The Search for Modernity's Disembodiment of "I" and "You"* (Notes for a contribution at the Bremen Symposium "Ivan Illich zum Abschied", February 7-8, 2003, translated by Jan Lambertz), p. 2.

24 Ivan Illich, *Gender*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1981, p. 3.

25 Uwe Pörksen, *Plastic Words. The Tyranny of Modular Language*, translated by Jutta Mason and David Cayley, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. Original German Title: *Plastikwörter. Die Sprache einer internatinalen Diktatur*, Klett-Cotta Verlag, 1988.

26 Illich / Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 219.

27 Cfr. Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon*, University Chicago Press, 1991.

nifico, the head of the Medici clan died and, according to legend, Savonarola was sitting at his deathbed condemning him for his sinful life.

Florence, the capital of the Italian Renaissance, now fell under the spell of Savonarola: pagan books and lascivious pieces of art were burned, a rigorous and severe lifestyle was preached and violently applied in the narrow streets of this grand city. But Savonarola went even beyond that by attacking the pope himself, Borgia, who entered history as a pure manifestation of power and lust. In 1494, the mills of history were active again when Charles VII, king of France, invaded the Italian peninsula to reclaim the kingdom of Naples for his family. Under the force of his mighty army, the brittle equilibrium between the culturally flourishing but politically weak Italian princedoms was destroyed. Before Charles' military enterprise, Savonarola preached in Santa Maria del Fiore that a biblical-like Flood was coming again to purge the world of evil. After effective diplomacy prevented the French army from sacking Florence, Savonarola was widely hailed as a prophet. This was the beginning of his power and at the same time the reason for his fall.

Of course, reality was much more complex, and Savonarola was much more than a religious tyrant, since his *vita* was deeply woven in the cultural tissue of his age: deeply loved by Pico della Mirandola, Savonarola was, at the same time, hated by Marsilio Ficino, and Niccolo Machiavelli never made too clear if he was condemning the monk or secretly admiring him. Until today, Italian historiography is split into those who believe that Savonarola was a charlatan[28] and those who think that he was a saint-like charismatic figure.[29] Prodi,

28 Cfr. Franco Cordero: *Savonarola*, Laterza, Roma-Bari,1986-1988, in 4 volumes.

29 Cfr. Roberto Ridolfi: *Vita di Girolamo Savonarola* (1952). An English translation of this text is available as *The Life of Giovanni Savonarola* by R. Ridolfi, translated by Cecil Greyson, New Work, Alfred Knopf, 1959.

as an internationally recognized historian, made his own view of Savonarola quite clear when he said:

> The central monument, much more than his sermons and his writings, on which someone should reflect is still *la Sala dei Cinquecento* [the Hall of the Five Hundred], which was built under the commission of Savonarola at Palazzo Vecchio for the Gran Consiglio [Great Counsel], established by him as a pivot of the new democratic regime, which replaced the oligarchy of the Medici.[30]

Illich had no intention to judge Savonarola's historic figure, as he made clear that he only touched "these slopes, the pre-Alps of the huge mountain of books which go under Savonarola's name". Illich was not talking as an historian at this occasion, even if he prepared for it as such. He was not interested in analysing Savonarola's historical significance but wanted to evoke the distance between him and Savonarola, wanted to feel the historic abyss between him and the Dominican monk because he wanted "to know *how* in a world of risk, probability, and virtuality, it's possible to talk [not only] about Savonarola, but also about Kant". Savonarola died in 1498 and Kant in 1804:[31]over the three centuries separating these two men, the historic and mental conditions were emplaced which, in our contemporary era, transformed actual danger into risk-thinking, prophecy into probability and the old notion of *virtù* (or *virtus*) into virtuality. Illich wanted to understand these turning points.

30 Cfr. Paolo Prodi, *Profezia vs. Utopia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013, p. 23. My own translation.

31 Illich mentions Kant because in a prior lecture, Mario Miegge (1932-2014), protestant theologian from Aosta and professor at the university of Urbino and Ferrara, contributed a piece on the interconnection between prophecy and policy during the age of Hugo Grotius and Immanuel Kant: *Profezia e politica tra Grozio e Kant*, in: *Savonarola. Democrazia, tirannide, profezia*, a cura di Gian Carlo Garfagnani, SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze, 1998, pp. 231-242.

This is typical for Illich, who in his later decades tried to conceive history through a double-loop: in one direction, history was conceived as *Verlustsgeschichte*; observed from the point of view of what was lost and not of what was gained;[32] in the other direction, through an historical analysis, Illich tried to honor those things which got lost within the totalitarian logic of progress. This particular form of historic thinking (*Geschichtsdenken*) allowed him to think *with* history rather than *on* history. For this reason, prophecy became such an important topic for him that he was "tempted to put "prophecy" into a tight epistemic bracket".[33] Together with Paolo Prodi,[34] Illich thought that Savonarola was "the last one who could pretend to be a prophet". What Illich tried to point out was the fact the prophecy was not primarily seen as the capacity to foresee the future but rather as the capacity to read the present. This was still perceived in a certain Catholic milieu as David Maria Turoldo (1916-1992) poignantly expressed: "Il Profeta non è tanto quello che annuncia il futuro, ma quello che denuncia il presente",[35] (the prophet is not so much someone who announces the future as someone who denounces the present). This was already clear for pope Gregory the Great in the VI century, when he underlined that "the spirit of prophecy doesn't foresee what will be, but clarifies what already is", it "doesn't foresee future things but it reveals whatever is hidden", it "clarifies to the prophesizing soul whatever cannot be experienced directly by the body".[36]

32 Cfr. Jean Robert: *L'età dei sistemi. Nel pensiero dell'ultimo Illich*, Hermatena, 2019, p. 86.

33 Illich, *Mirror III*, p. 147.

34 Cfr. Paolo Prodi, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 22: "Savonarola, che io continuo a ritenere l'ultimo dei profeti".

35 Cit. in: Prodi, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 112.

36 Gregorius Magnus, in: *Patrologia Latina Cursus Completus*, Migne, Paris, Vol. 76, p. 787 A-B: "prophetiae spiritus non praedicit quod futurum est, sed ostendit quod est […]; prophetia … non predicit ventura sed … prodit occulta […]; ibi fit presens prophe-

For Illich, our actual modernity was utterly overshadowed by what he called "the tyranny of our days, which is [the tyranny] of need". But this tyranny was the direct result of a worldview, which abandoned the prophetic capacity to read the present for the idealistic will to redesign the whole world within the time-framework of future-oriented project-thinking, also known as *Utopia*. He believed that the concept of "needs" and the one of "utopia" were strongly connected.

To understand this, we must follow the interpretation of Paolo Prodi. According to him, after Savonarola, the historic energies of prophecy were encapsulated and transferred to two novel ideas, which had never before existed in the Western tradition, from Antiquity through the Middle Ages: *Utopia* and *Revolution*. Both were the result of the secularisation process, which tore apart–temporally and spatially–the original unity of the prophetic dimension. The utopic ideal allowed the *novum* to be conceived in the virtuality of a mental non-place, while the revolutionary ideal conceived the *novum* in the virtual time of the future. If we look more closely, we can see how Prodi places this utopian-revolutionary turn between 1516, the year in which Thomas Morus published his book *Utopia* (which gave the name to the whole utopian current), and 1789, the year of the French Revolution. This period, from 1516 to 1789 covers, roughly speaking, the period mentioned by Illich between Savonarola and Kant.

In Pistoia, Illich clearly and fearlessly pointed out that friendship "is the only balance which I can oppose to utopia", a concept, which since the 1980s he always tried to avoid.[37]

tantis animus, ubi per presentiam non est corpus".

37 Illich, already in a speech in 1980 he stated: "... con tutta la disciplina a mia disposizione, insufficiente, – mi critico io stesso per il [mio] passato – cerco di parlare di quello che *non* è possibile; cerco di evitare, sempre, l'utopia, la descrizione di quello che *dovrebbe* essere [...] la buona legge che tratta dell'habitat dovrebbe, anzitutto, essere una legge proscrittiva e non una legge prescrittiva, una legge che dice quello che non puoi fare, che nessuno può, nemmeno il governo può fare, e non una legge

For him, the concept of Utopia, this virtual space in which the human mind could create a world for itself as much as the Creator did,[38] was the prototype of "a new dimensionless cybernetic space".[39] In Illich's view, friendship was not only the proportionate antidote to the virtual non-place of a worldless and wordless cyber-society, but it also corresponded to a new way of how the vocation of prophecy could be rewoven into the tissue of human relations. For Illich, the idea that someone could build a perfect building or an entire society as a pure mental project with "all material stuff being excluded",[40] was the historical precursor for an "intensive self-algorithmization, not only disembodying, but reducing myself entirely to misplaced concreteness by projecting myself on a curve".[41] And any thinking in utopia was for him a sign of "misplaced concreteness".

This is what Prodi summarized in his later reflections on the concept of Utopia, thinking *after* Illich:

> in the last centuries we moved from a Christendom, based on the *Incarnation* […] to a civ-

che dice quello che per ognuno si *deve* fare" (Convegno "Autocostruzione e tecnologie conviviali", Rimini, 1 marzo 1980). And in Gender Illich points out: "And I reject the label of scientific historian, for I will not reconstruct the past with key words, nor with concepts mined in utopia, yet I believe in honoring the dead by research that is public, disciplined, documented, and critical" (Ivan Illich, *Gender*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1982, p. 177).

38 Cfr. Ivan Illich, *Texte und Fragmente. Vorlesungen in der Penn State*, 1996, [unpublished] pp. 64, where he quotes Joseph Rykwert: "… man constantly builds his universe by words, as God had once made the cosmos by the Word," in: *The Dancing Column. On Order in Architecture*, London, The MIT Press, 1996, p. 84. Rykwert was in this particular passage talking about Nicholaus of Cusa, the great speculative Mystic and pre-modern philosopher of the XIV century.

39 Illich, *op. cit.*, 1992, p. 123.

40 This is how John Dee (1527-1608) translated in his *Mathematical Praeface* (1570) Leon Battista Alberti's (1404-1472) famous quote: "formas praescribere animo et mente *omni materia secluse*", in: *L'Architettura* [De re aedificatoria], Il Polifilo, Milano, 1966, p. 21.

41 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 210.

> ilization, where the flesh is vaporized into the word, in the revelations of seers or into the digital image […] the new [social] projects are facing the problem of the evaporation of the body into an artificial or virtual reality, in which the central problem of the choice between good and evil is radically questioned, both in the prophetic and in the utopic horizon.[42]

Illich, already in 1995, pointed out that friendship is somehow related to our "apocalyptic world":[43]

> An eschatological *philia* is newly, uniquely, urgently required by an apocalyptic environment [Umwelt]. In our common tongue translated: the mutual gift of the *pupilla* is as never before needed and made possible under the circumstance of a disembodied, depersonalized environment [Umwelt].[44]

For Illich "the mutual gift of the *pupilla*" was the supreme occasion in which the human being could become an incarnated "I" thanks to the grace of the "Thou": only when we are able to mirror ourselves in the eyes of our vis-à-vis, we can recognize our enfleshed self.[45]

42 Paolo Prodi, *Profezia vs. Utopia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2013, pp. 30-31: "… negli ultimi secoli si è virato da un cristianesimo basato sull'incarnazione […] a un cristianesimo, a una civiltà in cui è la carne che evapora nella parola, nelle rivelazioni dei veggenti o nell'immagine digitale. […] le nuove proiezioni pongono il problema di una evaporazione del corpo in una realtà artificiale o immaginaria in cui il tema centrale, sia nella profezia sia nell'utopia, della scelta tra il bene e il male viene posto radicalmente in discussione". My translation.

43 Illich /Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 169, p. 177.

44 Ivan Illich, *Texte und Fragmente. Bremer Vorlesungen im Wintersemester, 1995* [unpublished], p. 5: "… eschatologische philia wird neuartig, einzigartig und dringend durch apokalyptische Umwelt gefordert. Auf deutsch: das gegenseitige Geschenk der *pupilla* wird wie nie dringend und möglich unter Bedingungen einer entleibten, entpersönlichten Umwelt".

45 The Jewish philosopher Martin Buber was the first one who elaborated this I-Thou relationship in his book: *I and Thou*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith, 1937:

Friendship as prophecy, in its Illichian sense, presupposes this "fleshiness"[46]and it can be seen as exactly the opposite notion of the disembodying virtuality of our rising cyberculture, where the virtual non-body is seen as *optimum* and not as *corruptio*. Or as Jean A. Polly, the American librarian who coined the expression "surfing the internet", proudly underlined in 1992 when describing the new attitude of digital communication which was still in its infancy:

> The old barriers of sexism, ageism, and racism are not present, since you can't see the person to whom you're "speaking". You get to know the person without preconceived notions about what you THINK he is going to say, based on visual prejudices you may have, no matter how innocent.[47]

Not to see, *not* to feel, *not* to sense the person to whom you are speaking is therefore the anti-model of what Illich understood as *conditio humana*. And after reading these lines, Illich appears to be even more *alien*, if not equally distant to this "diseviling",[48] to that peculiar dimension of the our time in which, as Paolo Prodi previously mentioned, "the choice between good and evil is radically questioned",[49] since good and

"Through the *Thou* a man becomes *I* [Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich]". If not directly, this concept was brought near to Illich indirectly by the francophone philosopher Emanuel Lévinas and his idea of the *visage* as an enfleshed ethic (cfr. *Totality and Infinity*, ed. 1961). Illich, in his 1995 written preface to the German reedition of *Gender* (*Genus. Zu einer historischen Kritik der Gleichheit*, Beck'sche Reihe, 1995), underlines the importance of his current research on Lévinas and the historicity of the gaze, done in Bremen ("Hier haben wir uns bei der Lektüre von Emmanuel Levinas an die Geschichte des Erblickens der Pupilla im Antlitz des Anderen gemacht", p. 10).

46 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 206.

47 Jean Armour Polly, *"Surfing the Internet": An Introduction*, in: Wilson Library Bulletin, June 1992, pp. 38-42.

48 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 178. The original German neologism, coined by Illich himself, is: "Entbösung".

49 Prodi, *op. cit.*, 2013, p. 31.

evil have become equally anonymous, anaemic, anomic.[50] But this, at the same time, explains Illich's radical position:

> But I don't want to belong to this world. I want to feel myself as a stranger, a pilgrim, an outcast, a visitor, a prisoner. Yes, I'm talking about a pre-judice [Vor-Urteil], in other words, of a stand, no, not as *a* stand, about *my* stand [meiner Haltung]. A ground on which I'm standing [stehe], on which I'm withstanding [bestehe].[51]

Illich's very personal withstanding against the world, against this peculiar state of the world, this "Absurdistan, or hell-on-earth",[52] grew out of the awareness that he was living in a world which has lost the sense for good, the Good. We have lost the certainty that the world makes sense because things fit together, that the eye is made to grasp the sunlight, and is not just a biological camera which happens to register this optical effect. We have lost the sense that virtuous behaviour is fitting and appropriate for human beings.[53]

50 Cfr. *Mysterium iniquitis*, in: Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 59-61, pp. 169-170.

51 Ivan Illich, Bremen, Vorlesung: 21.01.1999, cit. in: *"Aber ich will nicht in diese Welt gehören...". Beiträge zu einem konvivialen Denken nach Ivan Illich*, hrsg. von Marianne Gronemeyer, Reimer Gronemeyer, Charlotte Jurk, Marcus Jurk, Manuel Pensé, 2019 transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, p. 8: "Aber ich will nicht in diese Welt gehören. Ich will mich in ihr als Fremder, als Wanderer, als Außenseiter, als Besucher, als Gefangener fühlen. Ja, ich spreche von einem Vor-Urteil, also von einer Haltung, nein, nicht einer Haltung, meiner Haltung. Einem Grund, auf dem ich stehe, auf dem ich bestehe". Within this horizon, Illich is very close to what Erich Auerbach, in a famous essay translated by Edward Said, remarked on Hugh of Saint Victor, who was a key-figure in Illich's intellectual journey: "*Delicatus ille est adhuc cui patria dulcís est, fortis autem cui omne solum patria est, perfectus vero cui mundus totus exilium est* ..." [Didascalicon ch. III, cap. 20]. Hugo intended these lines for one whose aim is to free himself from a love of the world. But it is a good way also for one who wishes to earn a proper love for the world (in: *Philology and "Weltlitteratur"* by Erich Auerbach, translated by Maire and Edward Said, The Centennial Review, Vol. 13, No. 1, Winter 1969, pp. 1-17.

52 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 239, fn. 1.

53 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 62-63.

This apocalyptic worldview was not simply the expression of intellectual pessimism; it was the prophetic attitude of someone who had the capacity to read the present rather than the capacity to foresee the future. However, this prophetic attitude is possible only if two conditions are fulfilled. On one hand, someone must feel the irrevocable and almost painful *distance* between the present and the things which have passed, with "the pastness of the past",[54] and, on the other hand, the myths, expectations, and artificial paradises of so-called Modernity should not overshadow this exercise of mind and body. In other words, the prophet who looks back on the past to "prophesize" on the present should not be swallowed by the "shadow of the future".[55] Illich's inquiry into the last days of Savonarola was precisely shaped by this double loop: he wanted to feel this historic experience, he wanted to be the magic mirror on which the present was not seen as the mere reflection *of* the past but as pure distance *to* the past. And only from this distance was the joy of surprise, as a prophetic act of an incarnated presence, possible.

If Savonarola could still consider himself a prophet, which exposed him to the temptation of power, Illich was ready to be *just* a friend and therefore renounce any form of power. His conscious act of powerlessness[56] allowed him to not only face power without being overwhelmed by it, but to also find a new path, a new possibility beyond any dialectic of history, beyond any revolution and counter-revolution, beyond any power and counter-power. Machiavelli was wrong when he said: "tutti e' profeti armati vinsero e gli disarmati

54 *Declaration on Soil*. A joint statement, drafted in Hebenshausen, Germany, December 6, 1990, in collaboration with Sigmar Groeneveld, Lee Hoinacki and other friends.

55 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p.141.

56 Cfr. Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 182.

ruinorno",[57] because his notion of prophecy was strictly theocratic and power-oriented.[58]The prophet is, on the contrary, always someone who is in open conflict with the Powers of this World: whether it be the power of the State or the power of the Church. The idea of powerlessness is, therefore, the very essence of Illich's attempt to pick up the vocation of prophecy in the new form of friendship. Or as Paolo Prodi points out about Savonarola: "in my opinion, he remained a prophet because he refused power as well as any utopia *à la mode*."[59]

However, there is another point which links Illich to Savonarola: both had the will to testify their own life; in the sense *testimony* in old Greek had a specific name, μαρτύριον (martyrion). In fact, the notion of martyrdom was deeply embedded in the historical consciousness of them both. Savonarola said: "Io non voglio cappelli, non mitre ... Un cappello rosso, un cappello di sangue: questo desidero"[60], which means: "I don't want any headdress, any mitre; a red headdress, a headdress stained with blood: this is what I want". And Illich matched this stance when pointing out: "By every instance in which one of us associates himself plainly with the suffering of Christ, he might just trigger the end".[61] This capacity to trigger the end, this apocalyptic disposition to realize that the End is a possibility which can take place at any moment in *this* life is, at the same time, the particular

57 *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli, trans. into English by Luigi Ricci, Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1921, p. 22: "Thus it comes about that all armed prophets have conquered and unarmed ones failed".

58 Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, cap. VI: cft. "Moisé, Ciro, Teseo e Romulo" vs. "Ieronimo Savonerola", in: Opere a.c.d. Rinaldo Rinaldi, Vol. I, Torino, UTET, 1999, p. 166.

59 Paolo Prodi, *Cuernavaca, estate 1966*, in: Rivista di storia del cristianesimo, No. 10, 2013, pp. 471-494; cit. in: *Giuseppe Dossetti e le officine bolognesi*, Il Mulino, 2016, p. 218: "... a mio parare, egli rimase un profeta rifiutando il potere e anche le utopie alla moda".

60 Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, cit. in: *Medioevo latino. La cultura dell'Europa cristiana* di Claudio Leonardi, Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 204, p. 714.

61 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 175.

condition which allows us "to discover God in one another",[62] this is the moment of the prophetic gaze which actually sees the present as the presence of God in the flesh of the other. When Illich evokes the historic scene of Savonarola's brothers in prison, accepting the very moment in which they lived as the one which triggered the End, he comments: "They prophesize—but not with their promises, not with the threat of torments and not even with their suffering—the face of Jesus, which they disclose, and which is disclosed within them [as] the acceptance of powerlessness!"

The shattering and shocking claim that Savonarola, who was brutally tortured and condemned to slowly suffocate by hanging, had "una bella morte", a *beautiful death*, is something which must be understood within the boundaries of this particular spiritual horizon; a horizon, where the art of living was co-existing, reflecting, and embracing the art of suffering:

> I strongly suspect that a contemporary art of living can be recovered. I believe in the art of suffering, in the art of dying, in the art of living, and, so long as it is in an austere and clearsighted way, in the art of enjoyment, the art of living it up […] The only hope for the life which I'm seeking rests upon rejection of sentimentality and openness to surprise.[63]

This *openness to surprise* was Illich's *Holzweg,*[64] a wooden path which leads nowhere, or better, which leads outside the border of what is known, and therefore remains open for the wandering joy of being surprised by the possibility of

62 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 176.

63 Illich, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp. 189-190.

64 Illich uses this term, well knowing the Heideggerian notion and interpretation of this term.

friendship. As he keenly confessed: "And my road has been one of friendship".[65]

The *Holzweg* of his "foolish renunciations",[66] which was also the road of his notion of friendship, was also the path of the fool of God, of the *stultus in deo*, a god-blessed clown, prophesizing, not as a prophet but as a friend, the *hic et nunc* of the human condition. The prophetic gaze of friendship gave him the grace not to be blinded by the shadow which our future throws.[67] And together with Savonarola, this hidden long-life companion, he knew: "Maior est abyssus misericordiae qua m abyssum miseriae",[68] which in a more Illichian sense could be also expressed: *maior est abyssus amicitiae quam abyssum miseriae*, the abyss of friendship is greater than the abyss of misery.

Illich's speech of 1997, beneath Savonarola's nose, gave him the occasion to state again his joyful foolishness, as a true Christian, or perhaps even as the *last* Christian in this sense, a foolishness which allowed him to say once again: "For, behold, the kingdom of God is among you"[69]against the perverted and secularized Christian idea of a Heaven on Earth: "where we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come",[70] by acknowledging that:

We have to engage in an asceticism which makes it possible to savour nowness and hereness, here as place, here as that which is between us, as the Kingdom is.[71]

65 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 152.

66 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 170.

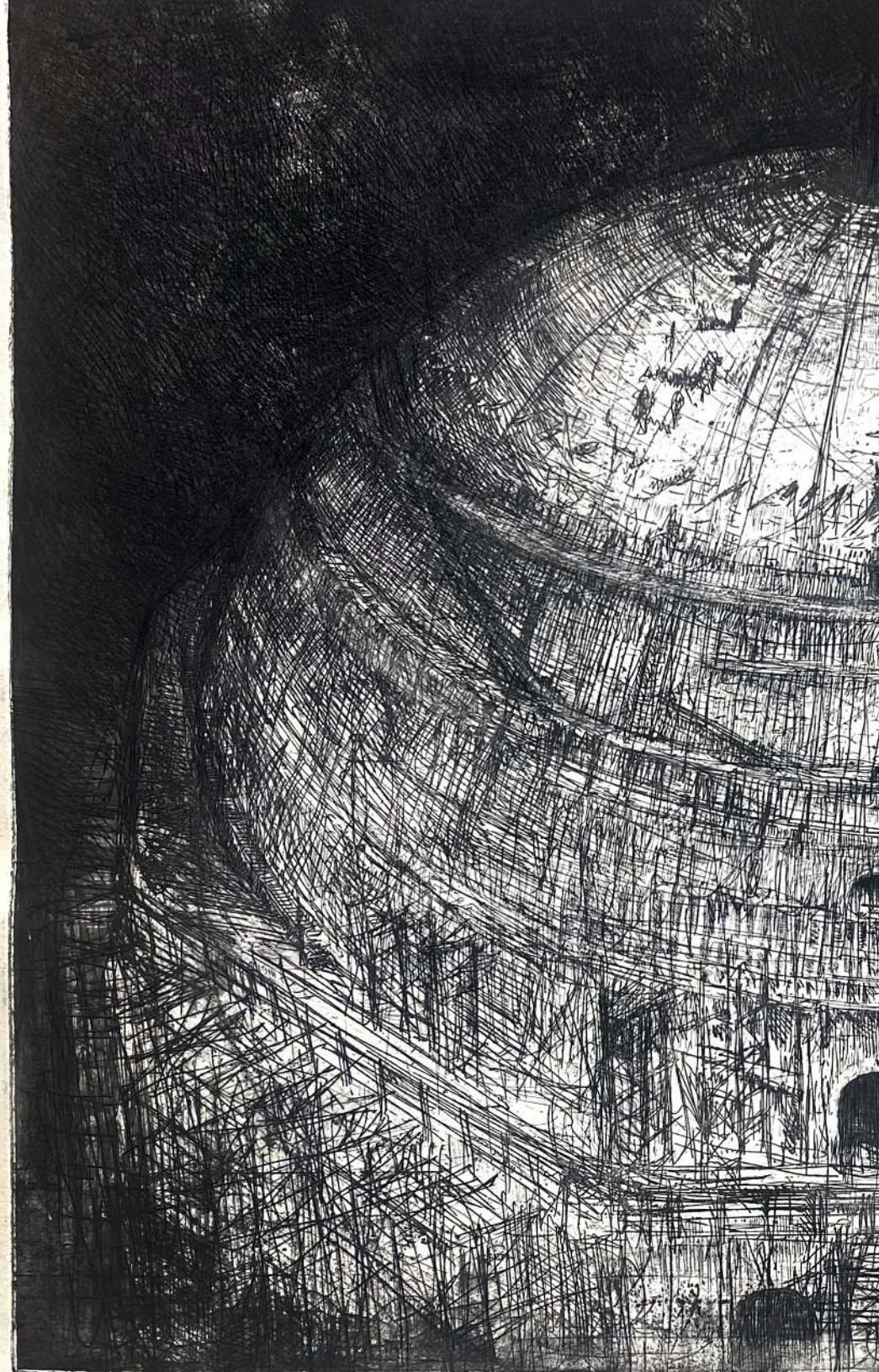
67 Cfr. *"The Shadow Our Future Throws": an interview with Illich*, in: New Perspectives Quarterly 6, No. 1, Spring 1989, pp. 20-26.

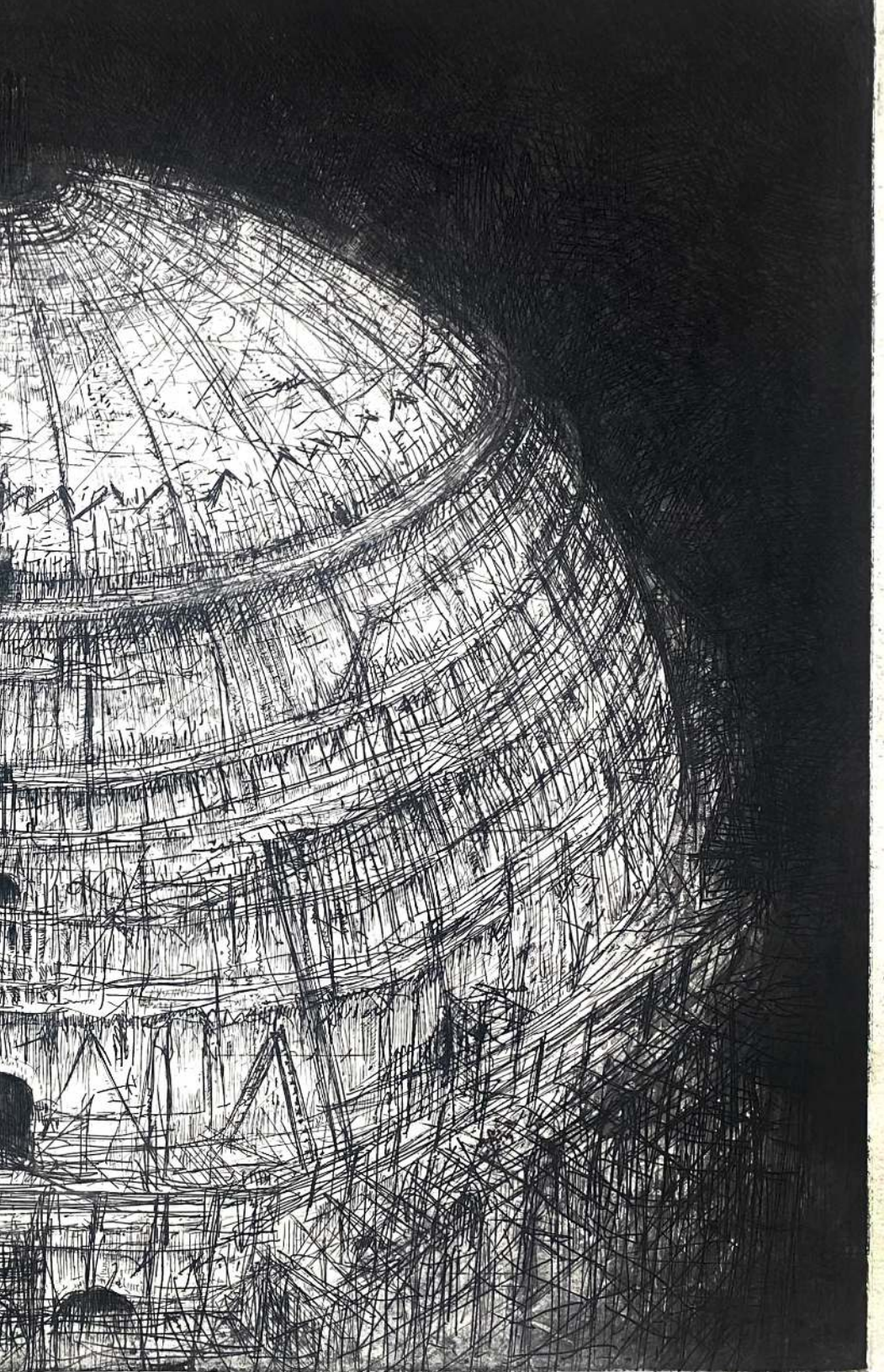
68 *Fratris Hieronymi Savonarolae Ferrariensis Expositiones in psalmos*, 1517, Venetiis, XVIII [v].

69 Saint James Bible, Luke, 17: 21.

70 Saint James Bible, Heb., 13: 14.

71 Illich/ Cayley, *op. cit.*,2005, p. 177.





Freed from religion?

by Samuel Sonderhoff

Today, the term "religion" seems to be loaded with very different, sometimes contradictory meanings in both modern scientific language and everyday language. Two tensions can be observed. First: On the one hand, religions such as Christianity or Judaism refer to a group of people who can be distinguished from those in a non-religious environment. On the other hand, systems theorists such as Niklas Luhmann view religion as a general social subsystem that performs the function of coping with contingency. Following this line of thought, one can search for religion in the spectacle of soccer stadiums or large music concerts. Second: F.D.E. Schleiermacher defined religion as a "feeling of absolute dependence" on a higher authority. In doing so, he made religion an inner, personal, intimate matter without intersubjective verifiability. On the contrary, we also describe people whose "outer" practices are strongly influenced by certain rules as being religious or pious. Religion usually takes on a pejorative meaning and is associated with repressed sexuality and adherence to outdated ideas.

In this complex field, it seems sensible to explore the significance of religion in Ivan Illich's thinking. A short excerpt from his speech entitled *The personal decision in a world dominated by communication* will serve as a guide. In it, he says, not long before his death: "I end with a reflection on how words and objects function in our modern society. The best way to quickly understand where I want to end up [is to say that words and objects function] magically, religiously. I don't want to be a religious man. I am the descendant of the

Samuel Sonderhoff, pax_et_bonum@protonmail.com
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Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 68-78

martyrs who, according to Roman law, which was very solid and precise, were thrown to the beasts as truly irreligious [*veri irreligiosi*]; they were people who somehow understood that Jesus freed us from what was then, as today, called religion."

Illich gives us some insights into his understanding of religion here: Ancient Roman law apparently defined religious behavior exactly. Jesus freed his followers from these legal regulations. Therefore, the first followers of Christ came into conflict with Roman law through their explicitly irreligious behavior and were brutally punished for it. It is in this vein that Illich does not want to be a religious man and criticizes a modern "religious" use of words and objects. Illich suggests a historical continuity of the concept of religion and, at first glance, categorically rejects religion *tout court*.

His insights raise a number of questions that I would like to address in this article. (a) First, I place religion (Latin: *religio*) in the context of Roman law and connect Illich's statements from the lecture with his understanding of incarnational freedom, which he developed in *The Rivers North of the Future*. (b) In a second step, I consider religion as a polemical concept. In doing so, I consider particularly the interpretation of Judaism as "religion" and Christianity as "outbidding religion with faith". (c) I then link the perversion of incarnational freedom to the modern religious use of words that Illich addresses. (d) Finally, I summarize my thoughts and interpret Illich's theology not as an abolition of religion, but as its inner transformation.

a) Religion and law

It is no coincidence that Illich refers us to Roman law for the concept of religion. This is where its etymological roots lie. The Latin (adjective) *religiosus* initially referred, similarly to *sacer*, to an area or object that was withdrawn from free use by legal and cultic rules of conduct. *Religio* preserves the

separation between a separate (sacred) and an everyday (profane) sphere. Subsequently, the adjective could also be applied to people who observed these rules and the separations they established with particular care. This is why Cicero famously derives *religio* not from *religare* ("to bind"), but from *relegere*, literally "to read again (and again)." A religious person is therefore someone who carefully reviews the legal regulations repeatedly in order to be able to follow them precisely.

Roman law provides precise definitions of specific spaces, times, and affiliations. In this way, the entire world is structured through categorical divisions. For example, the *pomerium* separated the city of Rome from the rest of the world, and the *augur* defined the *templum*, the area chosen by a deity for its cult. Religion consists of respectful observance of these divisions. Roman religion thus describes a mode in which the strict legal boundaries are confirmed and obeyed. Religion here is therefore not a special sphere, not a social subsystem, let alone a community of faith. Rather, it describes a relationship to the categorical boundaries set in Roman law.

According to Illich, Jesus has freed people, or at least the martyrs (and Illich himself), from this relationship to the law. Illich does not elaborate here on how we are to imagine this liberation. But it apparently led the martyrs to openly disregard not only decency and custom, but also criminally sanctioned norms of behavior, thus bringing them into open conflict with the law. In the martyrs, a new relationship to the law has replaced the old one. Religious observance has been replaced by free disregard or negligence.

These two relationships seem to correspond quite closely to those that Illich contrasts in his exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan in *The Rivers North of the Future*. Illich describes the world in which the parable is set as very similar to that of the Roman religion. People are neatly sorted according to their membership in certain groups. The legal

and moral relationship between these groups also determines how people behave toward one another. Illich refers to this as the connection between the Greek *ethnos* (people, clan) and *ethos* (norms of behavior). Who my neighbor is, who is commanded to me, is completely determined by my *ethnos*.

The Samaritan, on the other hand, embodies the liberation that Jesus made possible. He does not help the Jew in the ditch because it is his ethical duty (*ethos*). Rather, he helps him even though the Jew comes from a foreign *ethnos* and there is therefore no common *ethos* that would oblige him to help. On the contrary, he even commits a kind of betrayal by caring for an enemy. The Samaritan's behavior disrupts what had previously been considered moral decency and threatens the coherence of the prevailing social categories. The Samaritan allows himself to respond to his movement from his gut towards the Jew. He chooses his neighbor without restriction of ethnicity by establishing a free relationship. Illich links this directly to his concept of faith. For him, faith is a "mode of knowledge that [...] is based on the word of someone I trust, and [...] this knowledge, which is based on trust, is more fundamental than anything I can know through reason." Faith also disregards prior knowledge (cf. *ethnos*) about the other in human encounters and takes them at their word when they reveal themselves. In this respect, faith and religion represent two opposing relationships to law.

b) Religion as a polemical concept

Illich's polemical rejection of religion and his high regard for faith draw clear parallels to German-language Protestant theology. Karl Barth, for example, contrasts religion diametrically with faith. According to Barth, religion is about piously obeying the law and being justified before God by performing good works and observing religious and cultic rules. Beyond observing legal boundaries (as in Roman *reli-*

gio), Barth incorporates the concept of religion into Lutheran justification theology. For Barth (as for Martin Luther), faith means precisely liberation from the doomed "religious" attempt to justify oneself through good behavior by trusting in God's grace. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's demand for a "religionless Christianity" expressed from prison, is also well known and points in a similar direction.

Both Illich's and the German Protestant opposition to religion present us with a polemical and pointed rejection of blind obedience to the law. However, it leads to problems when we simply transfer such polemics to the phenomena commonly referred to today as "religions." The Protestant concept in particular carries anti-Jewish baggage. Judaism is often seen as a law-abiding "religion" that is surpassed by the freedom of the Christian faith. To this day, (Orthodox) Judaism is misinterpreted by Christians in its high regard for and meticulous observance of the law. The prejudice persists that Jews want to get something from God in exchange for fulfilling the law and doing good works. This is all the more strange when one compares a German Protestant service with a Jewish service. There is hardly a religious event that is more serious than a traditional Protestant service (and there is hardly a state with more laws than Germany). The Jewish services I have experienced so far, on the other hand, have been characterized by a relaxed carelessness toward the liturgy. Arriving late, leaving early, chatting, looking after children, but of course also praying – everyone does what needs to be done. Furthermore, intensive religious practice in Jewish theology in no way contradicts the fact that Jews know that their entire being is dependent on God's grace. Religious rules are not intended to enclose God in the human world and make him available, but rather to impress upon Jews their dependence on their relationship with God.

Ivan Illich, on the other hand, is a good example of a

phenomenon that Bruno Chaouat[1] has drawn attention to. According to Chaouat, in critical theory, Jews are not regarded as religiously stubborn, but as non-identitarian strangers and exiled stateless persons who transcend categorical affiliations. Illich refers to himself in some places as a "wandering Jew", thus hinting at his position between two stools. Chaouat holds this idealized image of Judaism responsible for the difficulties of modern critical theory in thinking about anti-Semitism and confronting the fact that there is now a Jewish state of Israel.

In any case, we can see that the question of the significance of religion is often linked to a particular interpretation of Judaism (and thus also of its genuinely messianic branch: Christianity). According to Protestant theology, Judaism establishes religious laws that are rendered ineffective by the Christian faith. According to Chaouat, for some critical theorist, Judaism represents the subversion of political-religious law. Neither image does justice to real Jews. Therefore, it is irresponsible to relate the pointedly polemical rejection of religion put forward by Illich, Bonhoeffer, or Barth to a specific religious community. The blind obedience to the law against which they protest has probably never formed the core of religion (in the everyday sense of a religious community). On the contrary, it could be that incarnational freedom occurs precisely within and in confrontation with "religious" traditions. Illich –deeply rooted in and at the same time quarreling with Catholicism– seems to be the best example of this.

To understand the polemical meaning of Illich's resistance to religion, we must consider it in the historical context of the time of Jesus and the early believers in the Messiah (the "martyrs"). With the establishment of the Roman Emperorship by Octavian Augustus shortly before the turn of the millennium, an era of massive expansion of the political (im-

1 Bruno Chaouat, *Is Theory Good for the Jews? French thought and the challenge of the new Antisemitism*. Liverpool University Press, 2017

perial) cult (also in the provinces), military expansion, and economic intensification began in the *imperium romanum*. Roads were built in the provinces, veterans were settled, rebel groups were crushed, and temples for the imperial cult were erected. The stark boundaries of belonging may not represent a fundamental anthropological constant, but rather an effect of the progressive intensification of imperial rule. It is only through an apparatus of power and violence that the boundaries between groups become as impassable as Illich suggests with his conception of *ethnos*. If the interpretation proposed here is correct, then the freedom that incarnation brings is a specific form of subversion of imperial power.

c) Religion and plastic words

And this brings us back to the exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Illich's interpretation famously leads to his ingenious paradigm of analyzing modernity as the corruption of the best, which is the worst (Latin: *perversio optimi quae est pessima*). The best (*optimum*) is the freedom of personal choice, through which the Samaritan creates a personal relationship that transcends the given boundaries. This best is made possible by the Incarnation, i.e., the belief that God became man in Jesus. Without the Incarnation, however, the worst (*pessimum*) is also inconceivable. For it consists in institutionally establishing and providing the new kind of turning towards one's neighbor. However, this deprives the relationship that has been created of its quality of personal freedom. The neighbor, who can be freely chosen, becomes a needy person who must be cared for. The care institutions create new categories of needs according to which they classify the needy.

However, this brings up the relationship to the law, which we have identified with the Roman *religio* and which the Samaritan transgressed through his personal decision.

Now the freedom that was supposed to free me from the obligation to behave in a certain way becomes itself a codified norm of behavior, indeed a duty that demands the strictest observance. In this way, *perversio* holds a religious element. However, the corruption of incarnational freedom is not simply a return to *religio*. It does not consist in the careful observance of legal boundaries, but rather in their leveling and flattening. In the state of *perversio*, there are no longer any boundaries or thresholds that I can transgress through my personal decision. There is only an impersonal space in which no personal decision is possible anymore. Instead, people become parts of communication or information systems controlled by management.

This is precisely the point Illich addresses in the lecture from which the opening quote is taken. It is also why he discusses the concept of religion in the first place. However, I think that Illich additionally assigns a spectrum of meanings to the concept of religion that cannot be traced back to the Roman *religio* and that is less self-evident than Illich suggests when he says: "what was then, as today, called religion." He is referring to a certain "religious" use of words and objects in modern times. In doing so, Illich draws on the amoeba or plastic words that Uwe Pörksen and he discovered. These include, for example, "communication," "system," "structure," "information," "problem," "strategy," "function," etc. These are terms that remove people, living beings, places, times, etc. from their concrete historical contexts and embed them in impersonal systems. One of the essential characteristics of plastic words, as described by Pörksen in *Plastikwörter*, is that they no longer have any concrete meaning and instead have a huge connotative range. According to Pörksen, they are "poor in content, if not meaningless [...], purely imaginary, meaningless, self-referential, and functioning only as tokens." As a result, however, they are "virtually unlimited in

their scope of application. [...] Instead of denotation, [plastic] words are dominated by connotation, which spreads in rings and waves."

In my opinion, Illich sees a connection between religion and plastic words in relation to this characteristic. The prophetic critique of cults in the Hebrew Bible recognizes the *topos* that idols are "nothing" (e.g., 1 Chr 16:26; Isa 41:29). The Hebrew word *ʿelil*, which is often translated as "idol," literally means "nothing." At their core, idols are nothing, have no substance, no meaning. The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, often uses *eidolon* for this. In another well-known lecture, Illich described the modern conception of "life" as an idol (from *eidolon*) and thus as meaningless. Their lack of meaning allows modern plastic words to be used in any context. This enables them to serve as placeholder terms for social abundance and "solutions for everything". In this way, they become unquestioned goods and set a social cult machinery in motion. The plastic words are therefore not "religious" in the sense of the Roman *religio*, but in that they are universal and meaningless. In this way, they break down the traditional boundaries whose preservation has been the primary concern of *religio*. We are thus faced with two quite disparate spectra of meaning of the concept of religion, which Illich ingeniously short-circuits here. Ingeniously—because both types of "religion" are opposed to the incarnational freedom that Illich sought in his thinking. Neither those who preserve all prescribed boundaries nor those who level all boundaries are free.

d) Freedom

How, then, is this incarnational freedom to be understood? Freedom certainly cannot mean the abolition or destruction of "religion." If Jesus had destroyed religion, then there would be nothing left to liberate. "Freed from religion" could therefore mean not the

abolition of religion, but a free approach to it. Our relationship to religion can be paralleled here with our relationship to the past. It would be naive to think that we could free ourselves from the past by cutting all our links to it. We cannot get rid of the ghosts of the past by destroying them, but we can find a way to deal with them by accepting their legacy.

Giorgio Agamben seems to me to be aiming at a similar idea in his essay *Praise of Profanation*.[2] Following Roman law, Agamben calls the process of crossing boundaries and thus blurring the boundaries between the sacred and the profane "profanation." However, he does not mean the destruction of all religious separation, but rather its free use, for example through play. In play, separation is defused and given a new purpose. From this perspective, he even describes 'negligence as *true religio*.'

Paul provides a good example of biblical formulations of incarnational freedom in his letter to the churches in Galatia. Here, Paul writes about how the Messiah transforms both the self and social-religious boundaries: 'I live, but no longer I (*ego*), the Messiah lives in me' (2:20), and: 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus Messiah' (3:27-28). Is every 'I' and every affiliation destroyed in the Messiah, as in the modern system? Has the incarnation thus brought about the irrevocable end of personhood? Today, we are confronted in many places with such a messianism that seeks to unify the diversity of what has grown historically in the name of "humanity" or "life."

According to my interpretation proposed here, however, the boundaries of the 'I' are not abolished in the Messiah. Instead, the Messiah enables the free use of (religious) boundaries. In the Messiah, I am liberated from myself. The corruption of incarnation, on the other hand, consists in the (neo-religious) non-entities that dissolve everything into an infinite process-progress. By ex-

2 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanation*. Princeton University Press, 2015.

tending the concept of religion to the levelling of boundaries, Illich ingeniously connects the 'pre-incarnatory' with the 'corrupt' state. The erection of insurmountable walls and the destruction of historically grown boundaries thus prove to be symmetrical strategies of exercising power that make incarnatory freedom impossible. Our task is to conceive of the delicate and precarious (yet everywhere shimmering) sphere that opens up between the naturalization and codification of boundaries on the one hand and their levelling on the other. It is precisely in this sphere, that faith, trust in the word of my counterpart, is located.

The way of Sense through religion, faith, philosophy

by Giovanna Morelli

The secular age

We are invited to ask ourselves whether "religion, faith, and philosophy are contrasting ways of life." This question suggests another, which logically precedes it: do religion, faith, and philosophy correspond in today's globalized cultures to recognizably distinct ways of living?

We are also encouraged to reflect on the secular age and its presumed end. Some authors, from Klaus Eder to Peter L. Berger, speak of the end of secularization, that modern secularization understood by the fathers of sociology in terms of not only the separation between church and state but also as a cultural decline of transcendence or the disenchantment of the world (Max Weber). The contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor speaks of our time in terms of a "fragmentation of the horizons of Sense," an explosion of new forms of personal spirituality gathered under the name of "wild" or unstructured spirituality, whereas Danièle Hervieu-Léger talks about a kind of "bricolage religiosity." At the same time, we are witnessing the return of religious imagery propagated by the mass media, which leads to the manifestation of the desire for belonging and spiritual guidance (think of those crowds that gathered on the occasion of the death of some pontiffs or the day dedicated to "God's influencers," digital missionaries, during the Jubilee 2025). Sometimes, the return of a religious identity is linked to nationalism or to the recovery of austere and normative models that indicate the lack of an existential self-shaping.

Giovanna Morelli, mgiovanna.morelli@libero.it
Morelli, G. The way of Sense through religion, faith, philosophy. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 79-86

Nevertheless, this situation does not authorize us to accept the end of secularization, of the materialistic skepticism of thought. Our globalized consumerist world is more disenchanted than ever. Certainly, as the above examples show, the secular era is not purely secular, but that is a phenomenon inherent to secularization, which is intrinsically and necessarily incomplete because it denies fundamental dimensions of the human, which will therefore re-emerge as they can.

We should rather distinguish a modern and a postmodern secularization. Pluralism, or the postmodern Babel, is exemplified by the spectacularization, promiscuity, and total horizontality of the network, with the related "social" perversion of religion and spirituality, which makes impossible any real experience of internalized transcendence. The socio-anthropological chaos of the postmodern Babel with its ethical and cognitive inconsistency, has opened the way to the last landing place of secularization: the paradoxical "immaterial materialism" of cybernetic techno-science.

Regardless of what might differentiate them, religion, faith, and philosophy have, over the long process of secularization, undergone a common decline, marked by disembodiment. The ways of life of those who profess a faith, adhere to a religion, or are nourished by philosophy, are today indistinguishable from each other and, indeed, from any other way of life. Certainly, there are some polarizations, for example regarding so-called bioethical issues and sexual identities, but these occur within the non-sense propagated by broader epochal forces that prevent anyone from shaping a personal life. We can speak of their common *corruptio* as the disappearance of *askesis* that united them in antiquity: here I mean *askesis* as a deep conversion, a spiritual exercise that engages life. As Pierre Hadot has told us about the Hellenistic and Roman schools of philosophy in which philosophy was an art of liv-

ing: a search for and care of Sense, the Sense that concretely inhabits our days and in turn guards the Sense of our humanity within the framework of being.

For a new metaphysics of Sense

When I speak of Sense, I am referring to the ideal purpose—to the "good"—that a thinking Will recognizes as appropriate to human self-determination, in the variety of its possible manifestations. But what ontological status do we confer to Sense? A psychic fantasy motivated solely at the human level? A Sense in the realm of the Non-Sense? Or do we "have faith" in a Sense of man, inscribed in a larger design or Sense of being? The ethical tension of which man is the bearer—the capacity to conceive, pursue, and even betray what is recognized as the good—interrogates the mystery of being. In that mystery the blind senselessness of chance could be hidden. Or conversely, that mystery could harbor an ethical awareness, a metaphysical teleology in which to inscribe the Sense of our lives and man's existence.

We know that faith is the prerequisite of every religion. But not every faith, every spirituality, recognizes itself in a religion. Just as not every philosophy demands faith. We know that religions have been and still are the communal heritage of vast segments of humanity, while traditionally, philosophy is a practice of a few. From a truly post-secular era, we would hope not so much for the return of religion in its divergence from philosophy and free forms of spirituality, but rather for their convergence at the table of a renewed *askesis* where a mutual conversion of philosophy, faith, and religion is possible, according to a new metaphysics of Sense. Even for those touched by the gift of faith, it is a matter of having faith in one's faith, as Illich once wrote. This is faith in man and his archetypal feeling of Sense.

The awareness that contemporary philosophy has

embraced the awareness that every *Weltanschauung* involves an act of "interpretation", does not condemn us to relativism. Jung's position is exemplary in this regard. In his cross-disciplinary research on faith, Jung acknowledges that every design of Sense is mediated by the human psyche but trusts that the psyche resonates with mystery through the symbolic interpretations inspired by our whole being. *Logos* does not oppose *pathos* but makes a pact with it, beyond the old opposition between the rational and the irrational, body and mind, aiming rather for integration. Sensory perceptions, feelings, thoughts, conscious and unconscious insights are the many organs of knowledge called upon to contribute to the imagination of Sense.

We can reclaim the search for truth without repeating the dogmatic and moralistic errors of the past; an open idea of truth, that is symbolic, transcultural, evolving, and overlooking a mystery that each of us can touch in the depths of our own mysteriousness, metaphysical as much as embodied "presence" to ourselves.

Corresponding to this embodied presence is the embodiment of the symbols through which the charism of mystery passes, be they words, acts, images, or creaturely beauty. In the faith experience of Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, Ugo di San Vittore, Hildegard von Bingen and many other masters of the faith, imagination accompanies the way of contemplation. The way of Sense is as ethical as it is aesthetic. Mosè and Aronne—the two characters in Arnold Schöenberg's work—teach us that otherness, the silence of transcendence is irreducible, inalienable, but equally irreducible is man's need to intone his songs to that silence, to consecrate earthly *contemplatio* to that silence, when even the mute mystery of a rose is worthy as prophecy, charisma of Sense.

Illich cultivated this search for truth—the integral incarnation of truth—at the table of philia and textual culture.

The table is where Illich placed his faith, religion, and philosophy in front of each other. Illich's life and his path of research stand on the border between the three dimensions, in a shifting balance. His hermeneutics of the revelation will eventually converge in the Christological theme of the Incarnation, according to an admirable dissimilar complementarity between faith, philosophy and religion. For Illich, the transcendent mystery of being, through the physical and metaphysical figure of Christ, is incarnated in the face of man, in the relationship that binds us to one another as witnesses to a mystery of love and salvation[1].

Each of the three dimensions will have to look at themselves in the mirror of the other and trust each other, like friends at the table of that *philia* which is a shared search for truth, cemented in love. The "life of free insight" and the "life of obedient love" are not irreconcilable, as Leo Strauss believed. Free understanding can lead to love and reveal to us the beauty of free obedience.

Jürgen Habermas and Benedict XVI point to this reciprocal learning between secular-philosophical and religious perspectives as a hallmark of the possible post-secular world. The "faith of philosophy"– *der philosophische Glaube*–of which Karl Jaspers writes, travels, in its own way, this path of reciprocal learning, in a hermeneutic tension toward transcendence. Reversing Jaspers' formula, I will call "philosophy of faith" or "philosophy of the sacred" the post-secular philosophy that, according to the invitation of John Paul II (Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, Sept. 14, 1998), rediscovers its own metaphysical "audacity." It is a philosophy open to that mystery which, while imposing its limits on reason, also expands it in the feeling of a *conspiratio*, a teleological architecture guarded by the transcendent mystery of being. Philosophy is

1 G. Morelli, "Ivan Illich and the Phenomenology of the Incarnation", *Conspiratio*, Spring 2023.

nourished by the truths of faith, and the truths of faith can be regenerated by the *recta ratio* of philosophy.

Philosophy of faith

In this perspective, philosophy explores the territories of the sciences, the arts, religions, myth, and the humanities (anthropology, sociology, psychology…) and listens to life, without prejudice. Through the multiple designs of Sense adopted by humanity, philosophy will be able to reconnect with the "cosmic intelligence of being"[2], taking care of the complexity and proportionality of our *Weltanschauungen,* that is the dissymmetrical complementarity of material and immaterial data, nature and psyche, world, man and transcendence. Humanistic visions, aware of the first transcendence that is given to us: the surprising incarnation of human self-consciousness in the framework of the world, where man, thanks to the freedom of his relative indeterminacy, is called to shape himself beyond the predetermined plane of natural law. An immaterial and irreducible sphere, call it soul or spirit, which perhaps abhors the idea of death because it unconsciously knows it is immortal.

We need a gaze that makes the fullness of the psyche blossom, from personal Sense to shared Sense, through the concentric circles of the individuation process: integrating the differentiated and often conflicting parts of ourselves and relating them to what lives beyond ourselves, up to the affirmation and safeguarding of our common humanity.[3] We need an anthropological principle that allows us to distinguish the specificity of man within the framework of creation; that allows us to distinguish a machine from a living, sentient, thinking, organism. Considering chatbots as "Alternative Intelligences" or accusing those who discriminate against them of "speciesism" is an idiocy, as is the dream of digital immortality. Religion, faith, and philosophy will not change our lives and will not

2 G. Morelli, "Nature from Kosmos to the system", *Conspiratio* Fall 2024.

3 G. Morelli, "Renewing La Convivialité, a half century later", *Conspiratio* Fall 2023.

save themselves, without the critical tools capable of dealing with the ethical and cognitive chaos of the present.

Science itself should sit at that table of renewed *askesis*, agreeing to question its materialistic parameters and all their contradictions, as the theory of Intelligent Design has begun to do. The way of Sense is ethical, aesthetic, and logical: can the incredible autotelic complexity of the living world be the work of chance? Can the feeling of Sense manifest itself in a world devoid of Sense? Beyond the specific arguments raised–and regularly challenged by detractors–the proponents of Intelligent Design accuse dominant science of being closed to the supernatural, and dominant science accuses them of not being sufficiently positivist. The dispute, in the scientific forum, is destined not to be resolved, because its foundations are philosophical and existential.-

The secular skepticism of thought, the "barbaric interval" that Jung speaks of in the mid-twentieth century is characterized by the overcoming of traditional forms of coopting the archetypal depth and by the absence of new possible forms of myth. According to Jung, one cannot voluntarily return to belief, but an understanding of the symbols of faith and their "abysmal wisdom" could help us "attain faith".

Although religious revelations are often judged unfounded fantasies and illusory consolations, the most valuable legacy of religions is precisely their grounding in reality–which is anything but illusory–of the feeling of Sense. Their strong hermeneutic weaving opens the gaze beyond earthly life and its death, confronted by the mystery of being and the enigmatic coexistence of good and evil, inscribing evil in a design where it finds its reason. In this perspective, we can also approach the "*Credo quia absurdum*", faith as acceptance of the absurd, that which seems to contradict all Sense. The initial sacrifice of Sense, like the "folly of the Cross" in Christianity is, in fact, the one that supports, paradoxically, the whole framework of Sense.

There are those who have read the loss of influence of the

Church on secularized society as an opportunity for the individual realization of Christianity. Illich went a step further, arguing that secular modernity carries within itself the secret heart of an institutionalized, perverted Christianity.

Postmodern spectacularization and cybernetic dystopias mark the decisive collapse of modern expectations in the management of social life. A new hope is thereby made visible and possible. We can preserve eschatological time, now and here, in our own inner time/temple, in our post-secular spaces of *askesis*, to practice an appropriate disconnection from the dominant imperatives and enjoy "a contemplative life in a technogenic world." The "rivers north of the future" flow through the veins of every man who does not lose the grace of faith, incarnated in those moments of *conspiratio* that appear as a prophecy of Sense, through harmony, dedication, gratitude, mutual recognition, and the feeling of eternity.

SIC TRANSIT
GLORIA MVNDI

Theology's Heartbeat

by Wes Avram

Among the ideas central to the thinking of Ivan Illich was his emphasis on the intimacy of the Christian message with its corruption. His invocation of the Latin formula *corruptio optimi pessima* holds the idea that the corruption of the best is the worst—giving a kind of apocalyptic weight to the history of Christianity. The idea radicalizes a dual affirmation, first that essential to the Christian story is a uniquely transformative affirmation whose implications are most congenial to human flourishing and, second, that that same affirmation holds within it a potential—realized in describable ways—for counterproductive enactment so destructive, and so self-deceiving, that it can be considered *least* congenial to human flourishing. Like flame and fire, if you will, Christianity becomes *both*—the best and the worst, inseparable. In short, the story of the coming of the One called the Christ unleashes a kind of instability that has chronically contradictory consequences, particularly apparent in the modern era when Christian language often masks its own perversion (becoming anti-Christ).[1] This instability is not simply an accident of poor application of the faith in some kind of 'user error.' It is endemic to Christian experience and the tension it represents is essential.

This instability should not only be a core topic for theology, it should also affect how theology is done. To think more about this, let us presume in a way consistent with Illich

1 Illich advocates a return to the language of "anti-Christ," with a remembered understanding of its traditional meaning, in *Rivers*.

Wes Avram, wavram1@icloud.com
Avram, W. Theology's Heartbeat.
Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 90-108

that on this side of Paradise all we can know of revelation's fire are traces of its flames. Finding those traces can be like finding evidence of how a fire spread in the wreckage of a burned-out house. Such investigation might be an apt description for how an Illich-inspired kind of theological reflection might proceed—free of any delusion of completeness or systematization. Such reflection includes a phenomenology, seeking words for an originating dynamic to faith that is pre-verbal, even pre-thetic. Theology in this vein becomes a kind of historically sensitive *negative theology*—intuiting insight without operationally verifying its claims, inferring a God it will not fully describe, and so scoring forms of human flourishing contingent on a divine in-breaking we can only provisionally explore (in time, as liturgy, community, or friendship) and only tentatively define (in story, metaphor, the dialectic of shared intuition and communally accountable rigor).

One can infer from this that there are always centripetal and centrifugal forces at play in both Christian thought and Christian culture.[2] A fulsome description of the Christian message will refuse attempts to subsume one force into the other. To borrow language from Emmanuel Levinas, such a description will be a saying and an unsaying in turn, binding meaning *and* sense. Its instability is this simultaneity. As one reader of Illich, I see no other way into his theology.

I will take a step back from these conclusions here, in order to work back toward them—a bit like a wave on a beach. I'll do this by exploring and extending the way Illich uses Luke 10: 25-37, the so-called Story of the Good Samaritan, as a narrative that displays both the innervating dynamic of the Christian message and, in how it is interpreted, its corruptibility—those centrifugal and centripetal forces.

2 I acknowledge the influence of Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of language here, as he describes centrifugal and centripetal forces always at play in culture, language, and ways of making meaning.

Remembering his fondness for the classical rendering of *ethos* as the distance one can walk in a day, this story of a walk from Jerusalem to Jericho is a theological ethos for Illich. By this I mean that it is a world of meanings he inhabits, and which gives character to his theology. That is nowhere more apparent than in his conversations with David Cayley[3]. He returns to the story again and again there, calling it "our guiding image, our guiding *topos*" (227). I'd go so far as to say that the story is so present to Illich that any theologically-sensitive response to him must tend to it, including parts of the story he doesn't explicitly explore but that might be helpful for constructing a view of Christian life convivial with his intuition. By looking more deeply at that story, the generative tensions that wind through Illich's view of Christianity become clearer.

My inquiry has four moves. First is a general discussion of the parable and Illich's use of it. Second is a look at two responses to his use of it, one from within the pages of this periodical by Joey Mokos and another from the philosopher Charles Taylor. Third is a return to the instability Illich senses at the center of the story, considered in light of what Emmanuel Levinas called "the presence of the third."[4] This is an attempt to ask a question that is as unavoidable as it is unanswerable: how to hold the tension between the centrifugal fire of faith and the centripetal demands of society. The parable holds that tension in ways Illich continually explored. Fourth, then, is a little of my own *thinking-with* by giving further detail to a twist Joey Mokos recounts in his response to Illich. That twist re-places the parable into its narrative frame and lets an often-unnoticed rhetorical move in that framing take us even deeper into how meaning and sense, judgment and mercy, responsibility and gratuity, control and contin-

3 *Rivers North of the Future* House of Anansi Press, 2005.

4 See Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981.

gency, justice and love, thinking and prayer might be held together, like a heartbeat. As far as I can tell, the heart of the kind of human flourishing the gospel message imagines beats in this way. I think it is the dynamic of faith that Illich both explored in his work and embodied in his life.

Whether Ivan would agree with my approach in all aspects or not I can't say. But I can ask, in the spirit of a student, for leave to try. In this way, this essay is my own gesture of thanks to this extraordinary teacher.

Walking from Jerusalem to Jericho

In his conversations with David Cayley, Illich credits Hans Blumenberg saying that the insertion of *contingency* into cosmology is a unique contribution of Christianity, replacing antique notions of necessity in being with what amounts to a universalizing of the Hebrew idea of a freely creating God. This insertion made possible the Christian separation of essence and existence (between what things are and *that* they are). Existence is dependent upon the unnecessary (but perhaps inevitable) *act*, or what the tradition calls *grace*, of a creating Other. This is the contingency of existence, bound to a creating relation born of freedom. Illich references Augustine's assertion that God created what is because it pleased God to do so, in a gut-expressing kind of pleasure. "It could just as well be that God would not have made us the gift of bringing this or that thing into existence" (Rivers 66).

Creation, even in its givenness, is in every instant dependent upon a free Other whose inclination toward creation is an overflowing, freeing what is to be. Alongside the idea of *grace*, Illich also calls this *gratuity*. It is the fire whose flames Christianity witnesses and celebrates. It is also the fire whose flames Christianity seeks to harness and control—unleashing dialectics of love and law, gracious praise and deafening silencing, boundary breaking welcome and

suppressing oppression.[5]

These dialectics take a particular turn with the modern era. Making this point, Illich again agrees with Blumenberg, that "the beginning of modernity coincides with an attempt to break out of a world-view defined overwhelmingly by contingency" (Rivers 68). This attempt to overcome contingency is achieved by reducing our dependence on a free act of the Creator to our own acts of self-assertion, unmooring contingency from transcendence. The essential relationality of being human becomes self-referential, not other-oriented.[6] Alterity (otherness) comes to be seen as a product of human consciousness, with difference increasingly taken to be a product of unpredictability, ignorance, or uncontrollability rather than grace. Contingency becomes *chance*, set against the vagaries of time and calling for knowledge, power, and control.

Illich centers the New Testament narrative, often called the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), as he tells this broad story. Both the narrative itself and in the ways it's been received take the dynamic we're considering back into Christianity's founding texts.

> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your

5 The idea of *gratuity* here is meant as a free expression of grace, given toward and for an other in an act that is both free and freeing. It is not meant in its more modern colloquial use as an arbitrary, flippant, even condescending gesture made by one person to another.

6 Zigmunt Bauman offers an interesting take on the modernization of the idea of responsibility that parallels this, with responsibility classically originating in the demand of the other (and so the pricking of conscience), now originating in the self. Responsibility lies in the other, as we respond to and enter into relationships with. The idea that one has responsibility oneself is uniquely modern, requiring this escape from contingency as traditionally understood. See *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (Harvard U P, 2008).

> heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."
> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10: 25-37, New Revised Standard version)

First comes an originating question. The young lawyer, well versed in socially and religiously approved ways of interpreting the world, comes to Jesus, restless. He forces a question on Jesus in the form of a dilemma that implies a crack in his confidence: "What must I do to . . .?" This is a question of need, obligation, achievement, and rightly ordered purpose. Jesus' response takes the lawyer back to the source of his confidence (however cracked it was), eliciting his expertise. The lawyer obliges with a schooled recitation: "Love God with all you got, and your neighbor as yourself."

The reply: "Go and do that and you will receive the reward you want." Still uneasy, the lawyer presses a deeper conundrum, which gives rise to our story. It is in his fateful question, "And who is my neighbor?"

So the story Jesus tells. Man on a long road downhill to Jericho. It's an in-between road in contested territory. He falls to thievery, is stripped, beaten, abandoned, left for dead. Stripped, he loses easy indicators of his ethnic, social, economic identity and status. We might infer that being half dead he's also lost clarity of speech, which would render him even less identifiable. Now come the passersby. They are religiously and socially identifiable. We can presume that the first two were pious and purposeful folk, knowing who they were (in contrast to the lawyer, who's searching). They pass the suffering one, even moving to the other side of the road—likely obeying purity laws. (Perhaps better to drop a business card with the phone number of a nearby homeless shelter with support services at his side, or make a 911 call down the road when a signal appears on your cell phone; service-provision is a multi-nodal and complex phenomenon in modern society, after all.)

The Samaritan, of course, does the opposite. He does not pass. He goes *toward*. He leaves the road and bends down to this unidentifiable stranger.[7] He treats and binds his wounds, lifts him up to his level by putting him on his own animal, and escorts him to an "inn"—which Illich was fond to remind us was more likely heard as a brothel, as there were no hotels as we think of hotels today. The Samaritan tends the Jew for the night, and then before leaving he negotiates

7 Presuming the victim to be a Jew, Illich liked to call the Samaritan a Palestinian—with the radical nature of such an encounter on today's Jerusalem-Jericho connecting us to the power of the story in its time. It also suggests something contemporary hearers of the story often miss, but which first century hearers might have heard, which is the personal risk (and fear) the Samaritan might have been taking on by choosing to leave the road to help.

with the innkeeper (the madame?) for the man's continuing care. This includes a down payment on costs and a promise to return to redeem any more debt incurred (and presumably do more if called on).

Jesus asks the lawyer to identify neighborliness in the story he's just heard, to which the lawyer responds from the same place in his gut from which the Samaritan responded. Neighborliness is in the boundary breaking relationship between the Samaritan and the suffering Jew—in his expectation rattling, wasteful, free and spontaneous act of gratuity. It is a hint of the contingency upon which Christian faith rests—not a contingency of *chance*, but one of freely enacted binding. It is gratuity, what Christians want to mean when they speak of grace.

Here also lies the impulse that, as we have said, can be all too easily corrupted (even for good reasons) as it is rationalized, regularized, disseminated, rendered repeatable and scalable, with human connection limited, in what comes to be called Christian charity. Or to those more concerned by the implications of the *freedom* this grace demonstrates, here lies the impulse that must be contained, controlled, returned to a more reliable program. Perhaps a little more policing on the road. Christian compassion demands it, after all. No toxic empathy here.

The history of Christianity, and so of all cultures influenced by Christianity, is a history of struggle over the implications of what happens in this story among that man who fell among the thieves, those two who passed by, the Samaritan who didn't, the innkeeper, our lawyer, and Jesus. And whereas most Christian ethics seems to spend its time between the Samaritan and the two who pass by, Illich sees the essential question of ethics to come out of what happens in the ditch. He describes a kind of ethics that ignores the limits and stratification of organized charity. The fire of faith is in the ditch

(in gratuity and contingency), not on the road (in evaluation and "responsibility"). Prudent distance is burned away by contingent proximity.

This story displays this gratuity in a response of mercy that has no adequately definable purpose other than its own spontaneous expression—irrespective of, and in fact disruptive to, the accepted expectations of moral codes or proper relationships. This is scored in the ditch, *between* the responding one and the suffering one. The parable is misunderstood when read as a lesson about personal responsibility at a distance (I ought to be kinder, or I ought to be less concerned with appearances or deadlines) and not, first, about a call to a way of being.

> What the beaten-up Jew's presence evokes in the Samaritan's belly is a response which is not purposeful but gratuitous and good. And I claim that the recovery of this possibility is the basic issue we are discussing here—the possibility that a beautiful and good life is primarily a life of gratuity, and that gratuity is not something which can flow out of me unless it is opened and challenged through you. (*Rivers* 227)

Two Responses to Illich on the Samaritan

Joey Mokos writes that Illich was trying to "make a point about the surprising nature of love, the inner turning of our guts that precedes mercy, and the radical redefinition of the neighbor that ignores religious, ethnic and tribal limits"[8] Mokos locates the insight Illich offers in Illich's interpretation of what it means to be human, or in what the church calls theological anthropology. The relationship between the Samaritan and the suffering one is an image of the kind of humanity both modeled and made available in the

8 Joey Mokos, "Go and Do Likewise," *Conspiratio*, Spring 2022, p. 200.

Incarnation of the Christ—resonating with the affirmation in the Book of Genesis (1:26) of the human being created in the image of God. So created in the image of a creating God (which for our purposes is less pictorial than it is relational), human being flourishes within an intertwining of ability, contingency, and freedom.

For Mokos, this intertwining puts a high value on our capacity to learn and to make (our ability), on our dependence on others in community (our contingency), and on agency (our freedom). It additionally acknowledges uncontrollability at its core. This also becomes the source of sin I've described—in counterproductive attempts to apply human ability in ways designed to control freedom and eclipse contingency. It is an error to equate a generative event of love with trained and normed systems of road-side assistance or emergency response. This is not to say that the passerby should not bother to make that 911 call. It simply means that we shouldn't pretend that call is something it's not. In its remove from immediacy, sacrifice, and encounter it's neither an act of faith nor an expression of love—even if it is a reasonable thing to do. It remains within what Charles Taylor would call an immanent frame—lacking a sense for the transcendent. The face of the suffering other is reduced to an abstraction incorporated into a system.

In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor offers his own take on Ivan's reading of the Samaritan. He lets Illich remind him of the necessary tension between sociality and the necessary codes and systems of society. Because his reading of Illich is more at the service of social theory than of theology, Taylor tends to reduce Illich's treatment of the parable to that reminder. He discusses how Illich's reading of the parable fits into a larger view of Western history, hearing in Illich's view a warning against over confidence. He also entirely accepts Illich's view that the over confidence to be eschewed

is not only a source of systemic secular violence, but is also the Achilles heel of church history—the *corruptio optimi* referred to above.

> What is Illich telling us? That we should dismantle our code-driven, disciplined, objectified world? Illich was a thoroughgoing radical, and I don't want to blunt his message. I can't claim to speak for him, but this is what I draw from his work. We can't live without codes, legal ones which are essential to the rule of law, moral ones which we have to inculcate in each new generation. But even if we can't fully escape the nomocratic-judicialized-objectified world, it is terribly important to see that that is not all there is, that it is in many ways dehumanizing, alienating; this it often generates dilemma that it cannot see, and in driving forward, acts with great ruthlessness and cruelty. The various modes of political correctness, from Left and Right, illustrate this every day. . . .
>
> We should find the center of our spiritual lives beyond the code, deeper than the code, in networks of living concern, which are not to be sacrificed to the code, which must even from time to time subvert it. This message comes out of a certain theology, but it could be heard with profit by everybody. (SA 743)

Being one of the most comprehensive thinkers of our time, striving for a unifying story that makes sense of the contradictions and possibilities of the modern world, Taylor seems haunted by Illich's challenge—not because this challenge counterposes nihilism to comprehension, but because it counterposes contingency to comprehension. Which, of course, is what the Samaritan also does to piety. One thinks of Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel, building palaces of thought

while living in a hut next door. Taylor allows Illich's reading of the story to be an anarchic jester in the court of social theory—which might be exactly where Illich himself positions the gospel in the magisterium.[9]

This way of thinking approaches what the Jewish thinker Franz Rosenzweig meant by "speech-thinking," flipping the priority of interpretation in philosophy from abstracting truth (whether imminent or transcendent) from its living context to rendering understanding in ways that are porous to, and so humbled by, sociality. Sociality interrupts knowledge with traces of an inexplicable transcendence. This is also, most surely, what the inheritor of Rosenzweig's sensibility, Emmanuel Levinas, meant in his own counterpositions: ethics with comprehension, sense with meaning, desire with need, me-ontology with ontology, hearing with seeing—the first of these pairings representing a phenomenon that is experienced (perhaps) but not comprehended. But the pre-thetic quality of that interrupting otherness is not psychological. It is *other*, outside the self.[10] I would suggest that there is a similar phenomenology at work in Illich's theology.

Returning to the Road

Staying with this line of thinking, there is another image from Emmanuel Levinas worth considering. When writing of the interruptive moral urgency of encounter, Levinas cryptically wrote: "The laughter sticks to one's throat when the neighbor approaches—that is, when his face, or his forsakenness, draws near" ("God and Philosophy," in *Collected*

9 For another treatment of Taylor's reading of Illich, see Eric Gregory and Leah Hunt-Hendrix, "Enfleshment and the Time of Ethics: Taylor and Illich on the Parable of the Good Samaritan," in Carlos D. Colorado and Justin D. Klassen, eds. *Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age*. Notre Dame UP, 2017, p. 217-239.

10 While there is no room for such an analysis here, it might be useful to investigate ways Ivan's anarchic intuitions join Levinas, Rosenzweig, and Kierkegaard.

Philosophical Papers, 166). The laughter can be taken to be the ontological presumptions of philosophy (and theology) to describe the existence of one thing in terms of another thing, abstracting reality into totalizing concepts. The neighbor, who is any *other* who elicits a response by virtue of facing us, calls us from outside the slumber of our self-same being into a morally charged response-ability. Prior (in priority, if not in time) to becoming aware of a person against the background of how we interpret the world (i.e. understanding them), we experience them as a plea (a demand; a call) for response, a plea that awakens us as moral beings.

The image of the echo comes back to mind. In a way that takes us back to Mokos' evocation of the *imago Dei* (image of God), it is interesting to note that for Levinas the "image of God" is that echo of the transcendent Other in the proximate other. To be "in the image of God" is to be called into being, to be made by, and so to move within this echo. This is the ethos of love we have already called *grace*, which also takes us back to what Illich means by contingency.

If the parable we're discussing is taken as merely a questioning of the passersby (of their *laughter*, if you will), one is left wanting to reform our means of upholding law and providing care. But if the questioning is taken to go to the locus of ethics itself, as it is by Illich, the parable can more easily sustain its challenge to the social order—privileging contingency in spontaneous acts of love that subvert patterns of reduction and so potentially hear the echo of transcendence.

I want to return to that image of the laughter that's interrupted by the neighbor, however. For there is a way to consider that image that can also invert the way Illich's account of contingency haunts Taylor—doubling back on it by taking Illich's account in another direction. For as much as the urgency of "ethics" (in the face of the other) interrupts the abstractions of "philosophy" (the laughter of being), so

also the disruptive "laughter" inserted into abstraction by continency can itself be interrupted by the demands of social life that return. Even as we love spontaneously and fully, with all our heart, soul, and mind, there are moral and social complexities we must yet navigate. Levinas calls this second order interruption the "presence of the third." He also calls it "justice." "Justice is the presence of the third," he writes. The presence of the third demands that we carry the one-to-one gesture of mercy back, however chastened, to the work of norming our lives. The presence of others requires that. But faith wants the return to have a surplus, porous to grace. The demands of general order cannot silence the pleas of specific others (especially when strangers). The work of making life cannot eclipse the gift of life, which we receive from others. So the return looks for a way of living that is simultaneously repeatable and maximally open—sustaining contingency. [11] Levinas uses the metaphor of a *heartbeat* to account for this kind of movement, with the diastole of contingency inseparable from the systole of social life—but with social life now appearing more like a liturgy than system, textured by a studied refusal to collapse one beat into the other, holding the beats together as at one time identical with each other and at the same time wholly separate from each other.[12]

Illich rightly moves our attention from the prevarications on the road to the grace-filled encounter in the ditch. Yet he also follows the Samaritan and the man to the "inn," noting that the breaking of expectations continues even there.

11 Zygmunt Bauman, for whom Levinas' account of ethics functions in a way similar to how Illich's account of contingency functions for Taylor, calls this the "problem" of the third. For Bauman, the basic problem for critical theory in our time is to preserve within the liquid realities of contemporary life what those very realities render nearly impossible to preserve, which is the stable instability (or heartbeat) of ethics put in service to human flourishing. See Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers*?

12 See "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987, p. 47-60.

As we've seen, the Samaritan recruits the innkeeper into the work of mercy, plans the victim's care, materially sacrifices to meet the cost, and promises to return. There is no reason to treat this as incidental to the parable. I'd go so far as to suggest that it gives hints as to how to sustain grace in the return to social life—moving mercy toward justice without eclipsing mercy. In the parable, the return to the road brings unexpected alliances mediated by unearned trust, sealed by a promise of continuing relationship. The scene at the "inn" is not a handoff. It is an *entrustment*. And in sealing this entrustment with a promise, we find a new layering of contingency. The world is now ordered by virtue of covenant (mediated by promises) rather than contract (mediated by sanctions). The road returned to is not the road the earlier passersby saw ahead of them. It is the promise of *conviviality*, to use another term from Illich.

Re-framing the Parable, Reframing Theology

We are not finished with this story from Luke. For there is another part of this passage that is relevant to the heartbeat I'm describing. It's a rhetorical move that Illich does not explore. Joey Mokos describes it in his account of a conversation he and I had with Ivan near the end of Ivan's life (Mokos 200). In a diner in Connecticut, near the convent Illich cherished as his place of friendship and retreat, we asked him about a rhetorical flip made by Jesus that mainstream interpretations of the parable, however radical they might be, miss.

To see this move one must shift attention from the parable itself to the back and forth questioning that is its frame. The lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds with the story. He then questions the lawyer in light of the story he's told, "Who was a neighbor to the man who fell among the thieves?" To which the lawyer responds, of

course, "The one who showed him mercy." This is in answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The shift of subject is often missed, or if noticed it's taken to be insignificant. But is it insignificant?

We imagine the lawyer as if one of the passersby, with the parable inviting him to learn from the Samaritan and consider the unidentifiable victim his neighbor. That's fine, of course, but it's not what the narrative does. Jesus asks the lawyer who was a neighbor *to the nameless one who suffered*, not who was a neighbor to the passersby. Jesus thus identifies the lawyer neither with his ethno-religious compatriots nor with the Samaritan, *but with the vulnerable one in the ditch*. This seems to signal that the salvific decision for the lawyer is not to somehow do better when he himself passes by, but to accept that the one (even a stranger) who shows *him* mercy is his neighbor. Who is *my* neighbor? If you can decide who is *the suffering one's neighbor*, you will know.

If you are only able to see yourself in the one with power and so refuse your own powerlessness, your own woundedness, your own desire for a neighbor, you will be lost. For you are not better than one who suffers. We need each other, each powerful and each powerless.

I've borrowed the image of a heartbeat to describe both the simultaneously disruptive and constructive dynamic that Illich seems to place at the center of the Christian message *and* the dynamic that any return to theology within the echo of revelation must preserve at its center. One cannot make that return without decentering one's self in receiving love, in acknowledging creatureliness, in relishing contingency.

The Heart Still Beating

In *Just Mercy*, Harvard educated lawyer, Brian Stevenson, describes his turn away from the rules of the game into which he was trained. He did this by giving his career, and

so also his life, to seeking justice for persons who have been unjustly incarcerated—the majority of whom are persons of color. With this has come an abiding commitment to racial justice and criminal justice reform. By any normal view, he is a living Good Samaritan. Yet in the HBO documentary about him and his work, ostensibly stitching his story into our Samaritan's story, Stevenson himself reframes the question in a way resonant with what we're exploring here.

After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the execution of intellectually disabled adults is unconstitutional, Stevenson had sought a stay of execution for a client, Jimmy Lee Dill, who was intellectually disabled. Appeal upon appeal failed, ruling that irrespective of the merits of his claim Stevenson was too late. Even a last-minute decision of the very Court that has ruled against such executions denied the requested stay. After a tearful phone call telling Mr. Dill that he could not stop his execution, lawyer Stevenson found himself in despair, feeling he could not go on in his work. In the documentary, he speaks of that night.

> I was sitting there in agony, thinking about why I do what I do. I kept thinking about how broken he was. My clients have been broken by poverty, broken by disability, broken by trauma, broken by bias and discrimination. But what I realized that night, that I never realized before, was that I do what I do because I am broken too.
>
> People sometimes say to me, 'Oh, it must be overwhelming and difficult to represent people on death row, to be fighting against the system', and it is. The truth is that if you stand next to the condemned, if you fight for the poor, if you push against systems that are rooted and heavy, if you keep pushing and you keep fighting and you keep doing, you're going to get broken. And what I realized is that I'm part of the broken community. And when

> you realize that, you don't have a choice in standing up for the rights of the other broken. (HBO, "True Justice," 59:00f)

To join the suffering, the vulnerable, the unjustly accused, the dispossessed, the fearful *as a neighbor* is to become a part of the broken community. This is the ethos of faith—the contingency, the grace, the gratuity, the receiving, the particular work that allows those centripetal and centrifugal forces always at play with each other to generate *love*. It allows the *entrustment* I spoke of above. It also allows what Illich describes as a kind of *obedience*. Illich's account of this could have been for Bryan Stevenson, or our Samaritan, or that lawyer Jesus encountered.

> Modern English has lost the word for this kind of trust. The biblical word for it is obedience. Obedience in the biblical sense means unobstructed listening, unconditional readiness to hear, untrammeled disposition to be surprised. It has nothing to do with what we call obedience today, something that always implies submission, and ever so faintly connotes the relationship between ourselves and our dogs. . . .When I listen unconditionally, respectfully, courageously with the readiness to take in the other as a radical surprise, I do something else. I bow, bend over towards the total otherness of someone. But I renounce searching for bridges between the other and me, recognizing that a gulf separates us. Leaning into this chasm makes me aware of the depth of my loneliness, and able to bear it in the light of the substantial likeness between the other and myself. All that reaches me is the other in his word, which I accept on faith. But, by the strength of this word I now can trust myself to walk on the surface, without being engulfed by institutional power. ("Educational Enterprise in Light of the Gospel," Un-

published, November 13, 1988, McCormick Seminary)

When Jesus says, "Go and do likewise," he might not be simply saying "be kinder" (as good as doing that might be). He might be telling his lawyer friend, and so us, to re-imagine it all, even the question itself, from the ditch, and from the "inn," and from the movement from care to *love*.[13]

We search for a locus of meaning on which to pattern our lives. Yet the meaning we seek is elusive, often heard sooner than seen: heard from around a corner, from persons or places we aren't looking for, perhaps from an echo. We find and are found, and—at least for a moment—we lose the need to distinguish between who is speaking and who is listening, or between who is giving and who is receiving.

Ivan was, as Joey Mokos writes, delighted by this conversation. He encouraged more. Perhaps the "more" he encouraged was the kind of conviviality for which theological reflection should strive in response to the instability at its center, to preserve the history of faith (against its corruption) in friendship: theology as the "speech-thinking" of the church enacted in a chastened, promise-filled *heartbeat* of mercy/justice, mercy/justice, mercy/justice—which might be the very kind of faith Jesus welcomed.

13 In *The Expulsion of the Other* (trans. Wieland Hoban, Polity P, 2018), Byung-Chul Han offers a prescription for undoing the solipsism of neoliberal culture that resonates with this message, saying that "what is necessary is once more to consider life from the perspective of the Other, of the relationship with the other, and to afford the Other an ethical precedence—indeed, to relearn the language of responsibility, to listen to the Other and respond (69)." This also resonates with Levinas' notion of "substitution," with the ethical relation signaled by substituting oneself for another, with the other's call becoming more urgent than attention to self. See *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*.

When the last becomes the first: Ivan Illich and Saint Paul

By Neto Leão

In this essay I take the call to explore the relation, if any, between philosophy, religion, and faith as an opportunity to articulate some thoughts concerning Saint Paul and Ivan Illich. These thoughts may find a coherent structure when confronted with two basic questions. First, can Ivan Illich be considered a contemporary of St. Paul? Second, by defining himself as a 'man of faith', was Illich affirming his contemporaneity with St. Paul?

According to Giorgio Agamben, contemporary does not mean to be in sync with one's time. Rather, "contemporariness is, [] a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it."[1] Being contemporary therefore implies not only being distant from the present but also, potentially, being close to the past. The suspension of homogeneous linear time, wherein first and last are the end points of an irreversible sequence, permits seeing the first and last as a relationship of proximity instead of distance. Accordingly, I propose the following: St. Paul is the first Christian and Ivan Illich is the last.

However, it is false to refer to Paul as the first Christian in either chronological or linguistic terms. While he undoubtedly played a significant role in the first decades after Christ, he was not the first believer. Furthermore, Paul never explicitly labelled himself or the brothers and sisters who became believers as Christians. Notably, the term "Christian" does not

1 Giorgio Agamben, What is the contemporary, in *What is an apparatus and other essay*, Stanford University Press, 2009, p.41.

Neto Leão, netoleao@tutanota.com
Leão, N. When the last becomes the first: Ivan Illich and Saint Paul. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 109-124

appear in any of his epistles. It is Luke who records in the Acts of the Apostles that the disciples were initially referred to as Christians in Antioch. Saul, who would later become Paul, was among them. (Acts 11,26). The second occurrence of the word "Christian" also appears in Acts, in the context of Paul's appearance before King Herod Agrippa II in Caesarea.

Paul, a Roman citizen, sought to be tried in Rome because he was apprehensive about getting an unfair trial in Judea. The governor Festus arranged a hearing with the King since he found it unreasonable to send a prisoner to Rome without specifying the charges against him. After two years of incarceration, Paul was finally summoned to be heard before the king and his sister Berenice.

Paul presented his defense against the false accusations of the Jews and recounted his story. The accounts follow his trajectory from a member of the Pharisees and persecutor of the followers of Christ until the event at the road to Damascus. Like the time at the Areopagus in Athens, Paul was interrupted by Festus when he announced the resurrection of the Messiah, even called insane. Paul remained steadfast and fearlessly declared that he could speak freely to the king. He concluded by inquiring if the king Agrippa believed the prophets. The king replied: "do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" The core aspect of this narrative lies not in the second occurrence of the word "Christian" – the third and last occurrence is in the first letter of Peter – but rather in Paul's response: "short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains" (Acts 26,28-29).

Paul's response to King Agrippa continues to resonate to this day. For the philosopher, Paul is the pioneering figure of Christianity who introduced a concept of time unknown to the ancient world, of which Illich represents the culmination. For the historian, long is the time between Paul and Illich

which renders any reference to their contemporaneity almost absurd. For the believer, short time or long are irrelevant, as eternal time is always at hand. And when what is at hand perdures, the last can become the first, except for the chains.

Thus, the question of *what it means* to become Paul is less significant than the question of *how to become* Paul. I think Illich knew that. I believe Illich became what Paul was. Despite the two millennia that separates Illich from Paul, I interpret Paul as the first Christian and Illich the last.

The event Christ

The "event Christ" has two foundational concrete realities that significantly marked its novelty and absurdity. Firstly, that he is the incarnation of God, the eternal Alpha and Omega, who declared "I am who I will be" to Moses while the burning bush remained unharmed, became flesh and dwelt in the fragility of human form. Secondly, that the enfleshed God suffered a horrendous death and after three days in the depths of a borrowed tomb rose in the same body that had been nailed to the cross. He then walked among his friends until he ascended to heaven.

I contend that both Saint Paul and Ivan Illich were faithful to the event Christ and in this way contemporaries. The first centered his discourse on the resurrection whereas the last on the incarnation. In the two-thousand-year gap separating their contemporaneity, Paul had to confront a fundamentally new reality: how to be faithful to the event Christ in action and words. Chronologically closer to the event, its freshness imposed the need to craft a new discourse that embodied the event itself as its core message. In the other hand, Illich's fidelity to the event Christ made him see modernity as a perversion of it, where Christ's message became the engine of a long process of institutionalizing gratuitous love. Consequently, he could assert to David Cayley that we are not living in a

post-Christian era but rather in "the most obviously Christian epoch, which might be quite close to the end of the world."

If Paul is the archetype for the first Christians, I suggest Illich is the archetype of the last ones. For Badiou, an event is susceptible to being apprehended only in its relation to localized situations which have the potential to put such situations into motion. The event Christ, therefore, is the pure happening for both Paul and Illich, always in relation to their situations and time. Although they lived in different times and faced different situations both remained faithful to the event that can put into motion the eternal day which is always at hand. In this sense, they are con-temporaries to the event Christ. Therefore, I will begin my considerations of Saint Paul and conclude with Ivan Illich.

Paul: the first Christian

Paul was chosen to spread the [Christic] Way, as Saint Luke describes those who were following Christ (Acts 9), to all the nations (*ethne*), until the ends of the earth. Thus, the question of how he did so seem to be the most pertinent. The dichotomy neither Greek nor Jew offers an answer. I suggest we take this syntagm not as a reference to two peoples and their languages, customs, believes, and territories but, following Badiou, as names for contrasting *subjective dispositions*.[2] More precisely, Badiou argues that 'Jew' and 'Greek' name "regimes of discourse" that Paul considers to be the two coherent intellectual figures of the world he inhabits. In essence, the Jewish discourse is one of signs, which renders necessary the subjective figure of the prophet who reveals to the elect what is obscure and meant to be deciphered. On the other hand, the Greek discourse, is one of wisdom, which is based on the subjective figure of the wise man or

2 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: the foundation of universalism*, Stanford University Press 2003, page 41.

the philosopher, who "appropriates the fixed order of the world, in the matching of the logos to being". In contrast to the prophet and the philosopher, Paul's gesture of spreading the Word entails "the man of faith" who "position[s] a third discourse, his own, in such a way as to render its complete originality apparent" (Badiou, 2003, p. 41).

One of the most remarkable historical realities regarding the texts that compose the New Testament is that all the letters of Paul predate any of the four canonical Gospels. In his letters, however, there is not a single parable of the redeemer, mentions to any stories or details of the biography of Jesus of Nazareth nor an account of his signs and miracles – no multiplication of fish and bread, no walking on water or giving sight to the blind, no transformation of water into wine. These narratives are not only non-existent in his letters but also seem to have been completely absent in Paul's preaching.

Nevertheless, he was the first to write in Christic terms. It is widely accepted that the core of Paul's preaching is the resurrection of Christ, "for if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain" (1 Corinthians 15:16,17).[3] By centering his discourse on the pure event of the resurrection, Paul commits himself to it. As he stated, "for me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). I believe Badiou provides a clear explanation of the stakes involved:

> The announcement of the gospel is made without the wisdom of language "lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." What does it mean for the event whose sign is the cross to be emptied of its power? Simply, that this event is of such a character as to render the philosophical logos incapable of declaring it. The underlying thesis is

3 See also 1 Thessalonians 4,13-18 and Romans 6:1-11. For accounts of Paul's preaching where the highest point of the message is the resurrection, the cases of Paul in Athens and before king Agrippa II, see Acts 17:16-34 and 26:22-29 respectively.

> that one of the phenomena by which one recognizes an event is that the former is like a point of the real [*point de réel*] *that puts language into deadlock*. This deadlock is folly (*moria*) for Greek discourse, which is a discourse of reason, and it is a scandal (*skandalon*) for Jewish discourse, which insists on a sign of divine power and sees in Christ nothing but weakness, abjection, and contemptible peripeteia. What imposes the invention of a new discourse, and of a subjectivity that is neither philosophical nor prophetic (the apostle), is precisely that it is only by means of such invention that the event finds a welcome and an existence in language. For established languages, it is inadmissible because it is genuinely unnamable.

Therefore, Christ is *a coming* that interrupts the previous regimes of discourse[4]. He is an event that happens to us, as it also happened to Paul. What constitutes the new subject who is faithful to the event is faith itself, which can only happen if the discourse announcing the event renounces prophetic and philosophical speech. To be what Paul was is to be faithful to the event Christ. To live the Way is to live relieved of law and logic and to celebrate the event aware that Christ is a coming, someone who happens to me. Although Paul's experience of the event Christ is, for the want of a better word, miraculous, only because it is unpronounceable or unsayable. Faith admits to neither logical proof nor religious signs. Indeed, it is precisely the lack of proofs that proves faith. What happens to us remains unpronounceable, what Badiou calls the fourth and hidden discourse.

How did Paul relieve himself from the Law? Imitating Christ, Paul did not destroy the Law but rendered it inoperative by neutralizing the dichotomy of Jew and Greek and creating

4 Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: the foundations of universalism*, Stanford University Press, 2003, page 48.

the space for a third and new subject, a third and new language. This becomes clear in Paul's short letter to Philemon.

Paul is imprisoned in Rome from where he writes to Philemon. The content of the letter is quite straightforward. A man called Onesimus was a runaway slave who belonged to the household of Philemon, his master. Onesimus became Paul's "child", as he refers to him, someone he "fathered" while they were both in prison. The letter is a plea to Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his household no longer as a slave but as a brother in Christ. He states that, although he is bold enough in Christ to command Philemon to do his duty, he appeals to him on the basis of love, a gratuitous love. While sending Onesimus back to his household, Paul chooses a singular word to refer to the subject of the lawless relationship between one and another, as someone "whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels (σπλάγχνα)[5]."

Firstly, Paul addresses Philemon as a fellow laborer in Christ; secondly, he appeals to love to address a man whom Christ had happened to, a man who had chosen the Christic Way; thirdly, he refers to Onesimus as someone to whom he was drawn to from his bowels, a relation that can only be consummated in an act of gratuitous love. According to Badiou, the stirring towards another that is felt elementally only discloses a possibility; the work done to faithfully transform that possibility into actuality is named love and only those who declare it are bound to this love, which Paul calls a labor. Thus says Paul, "though I have all faith, so that I could

5 The Greek word σπλάγχνα, often translated as bowels or the inward parts, appears twelve times in the New Testament. The first occurrence is in Paul's letter to Philemon in the context of the relationship between Onesimus and Paul. All the others pertain to the synoptic Gospels, among which the Gospel of Luke in the parable of the Samaritan. This parable is paradigmatic at least among the Illich circle. It is well-known that both historians and theologians consider a close friendship between Paul and Luke. The Acts, written by Luke as a continuation of his Gospel, would have been based on several accounts of Paul. It is remarkable that these two men used the same word to refer to acts of gratuitous love.

remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2). The assembly of those who belong to the Way, the Church, is made of fellow laborers, those who are faithful to the event, who accept the grace, the possibility of the consistency of love (Badiou, 2003, p. 92).

There is no universal law in Paul stating that every master should take his slave as a brother or sister. There is no attempt to institutionalize, to systematize or even to establish a permanent state of lawlessness among masters and slaves, wives and husbands, men and women. "But this I say, brothers and sisters, the time is short: it remains, that those who have wives should live as if they do not; And they that weep, as if they did not; and they that rejoice, as if they were not; and they that buy, as if it were not theirs to keep; And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passes away" (1 Corinthians 7:29-31). As Giorgio Agamben has remarked, the 'as if' of Saint Paul refers to the messianic concept of living in the present moment which is always an eternal one and detached from the normal structures of the world and its concerns.[6] This is the state of messianic time where this new subject lives in the world and not fully of it, in a state of suspension or detachment from the existing order which does not destroy it.

This new subject exists in the time that remains, in messianic time when one is "not conformed to this world: but […] transformed by renewing your mind" (Romans, 12:2). Love is labor borne of fidelity; fidelity is loyalty to the event Christ; the event Christ happens to one, in one's bowels; love does not conform to or transform the world but re-news us, makes a new subject. And if this new subject is to be called Christian, then Saint Paul is undoubtedly the first one.

6 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, Stanford University Press, 2005.

Ivan Illich: the last Christian

Illich had long dwelt on the meaning of *perversio optimi quae est pessima* (the perversion of the best which is the worst). For him, "the Incarnation makes possible a surprising and entirely new flowering of love and knowledge[7]." His reading of the Parable of the Samaritan, presented in 1966 at the occasion of a seminar in Cuernavaca and recently published as *Concerning Aesthetic and Religious Experience*, is crucial for understanding the corruption of gratuitous love. The story is well-known, the Samaritan's action towards the half-dead beaten Jew in the ditch is driven by his bowels (σπλάγχνα). The narrative is a response to the question posed by a Pharisee: "who is my neighbor." This relationship remains a gift: "your neighbor is he whom you choose to love willingly" (Illich, 2018, p. 84). In Illich's account, the same stirring that moved Paul to a brotherhood in Christ with Onesimus moves the Samaritan towards the beaten Jew. In his fidelity to the event Christ, in his love of Christ, Illich is contemporaneous with Paul. He is contemporaneous with Paul precisely because and to the extent that he sees modernity as a *perversion* of the event-Christ. In Illich's account, this most Christian of epochs can also be understood of the corruption of gratuitous love, of vernacular speech, and of the kingdom of God.

As Illich observed, the relationship founded on gratuitous love was also amenable to institutionalization, which began after the Church achieved official status within the Roman Empire. Illich noted that it was customary for a Christian home in the early centuries to keep a spare mattress and some extra bread in case Jesus should visit them in the form of a stranger: "when did we see You a stranger and take You in? … Truly I say to you as much as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers you have done it to Me" (Matthew 25:38,40). With

7 David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, House of Anansi, 2005, p. 47.

the growth and strengthening of the Roman Catholic Church, Samaritan corporations began to emerge across the Empire. These institutions were charged with taking care of the homeless stranger, of institutionalizing God's action in the world, and thereby transformed the felt relationship of neighborliness into an administrative procedure and ideology[8].

However, Saint John Chrysostom vehemently opposed the rise of these *xenodocheia*, literally 'house of foreigners'. For him, the Christian household would no longer have a spare mattress or extra bread. Illich concluded that "the attempt to be open to all who are in need results in a degradation of hospitality and its replacement by caregiving institutions" (Cayley, 2005, p. 55).

Illich reaffirms Paul's gesture, remaining faithful to the gratuitous love, to the movement in the bowels, and identifying the perversion of this relationship as a perversion of the Church "that, by institutionalizing itself more and more as an alleged *societas perfecta*, has furnished the modern State with the model for completely taking charge of humanity"[9]. Five centuries after the emergence of Samaritan corporations, only the Church could offer the nourishing milk of salvation. Illich recalls Pope Gregory VII naming "the Church as *Mater*, *Magistra*, and *Domina* – mother, authoritative teacher, sovereign."[10] The institutionalization of the Gospel took many centuries until the constitution of a formal maternal authority that offered an exclusive universal service, namely salvation through baptism.

Illich suggests that the peak of the Church's image as maternal authority can be traced back to Carolingian times. Following the Church reform led by the Scottish monk Alcuin, the court philosopher of Charles the Great, the term 'holy

8 David Cayley, *The Rivers North of the Future*, House of Anansi, 2005, p. 54.

9 Giorgio Agamben, *The Mystery of Evil*, Stanford University Press, 2017, p. 11.

10 Ivan Illich, *Shadow work*, Marion Boyars, 1981, p. 45.

mother the church' ceased to "almost entirely mean the actual assembly of the faithful whose love, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, engenders new life in the very act of meeting."[11] Instead, it meant the sacred mother whose ordained male priests provided pastoral care for the individual family and village. For Illich, this "gender-specific mythology of male hierarchies mediating access to the institutional source of life is without precedent" (Illich 1981 p. 60).

For this pastoral care the sacraments of the liturgy must be performed in Latin, the language of administration and church doctrine. Consequently, *lingua vulgaris* became the term by which to distinguish vernacular speech from Latin, the holy mother tongue. However, peasants were not to be taught Latin, they lived their everyday lives grounded in vernacular speech drawn from their cultural environment. The sacred scriptures were a scarce resource, but the church never dared to insert such sacred language into the mouths of those poor souls. The holy mother tongue was never intended to be universally taught.

Nebrija's *Gramatica Castellana* extended the maternal representation of the church to the Crown. A maternal state must have a mother tongue universally taught. Nebrija petitioned the Queen to control her subjects' speech to bring them under her administrative control. His grammar was a tool for the monopoly over the tongue, for a taught official language to replace vernacular speech. Nebrija was advising the Crown to silence and suppress the abundance of vernacular tongues by transforming the word into a scarce tool that required universal instruction. As Illich observed, "formerly there had been no salvation outside the Church; now, there would be no reading, no writing – if possible, no speaking – outside the educational sphere" (Illich, 1981, p. 44). This new reality disembodied the words on which people existed and

11 Ivan Illich, *Shadow work*, Marion Boyars, 1981, p. 59.

shared. The spoken word then became taught grammar and scarcity dwelt among us.

At this juncture, it becomes clear that, for Illich, the history of the West cannot be separated from the history of the Church and that modernity is the culmination of this long process of perversion of the event Christ. Illich described this modern setting as a castle where a different curtain would move at any moment revealing a new mirror, thus only seeing a reflection of oneself. There were two ways to move within this hall. The first encompassed those who could not find an exit and would simply conform (to the man-made world); the second involved those who would look for a window, expect it or at least did not exclude it (try to get out of the man-made world). To contrast the Christic Way with this modern setting, Illich uses the following image:

> There is no window, and the kingdom of God is among us. We must believe in it, and thus, seek it; or we must find it, and then recognize it. Some will achieve this only at the time of their death, as happened with the well-known good thief. But one thing is for sure: there is no window. Instead, there are walls. But one day, the whole castle along with all its walls and its mirrors will loudly come crumbling down.

For Illich, the kingdom of God is always at hand. It is here and now. The Christic way is to be in the world and not of it[12]. As he states, "the kingdom comes, and it already is. It is the kingdom of God that comes, and which is already among us (not subjectively speaking "in" each one of us—let alone cosmologically beyond us—but among us)" (Illich, 2018, p. 83).

12 This is precisely the way in which the author of the epistle to Diognetus, written around the year AD 130, describes the manners of the 'first Christians': "they dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others and yet endure all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers."

The kingdom is among us, it is a collective reality, it is holiness as socialization. For Illich and Paul, the Church is the social sense in which the kingdom already exists among us through fraternal and gratuitous love[13]. Onesimus and Philemon are socially embedded in the roles of slave and master (they are in the world), and they also belong to a community of fraternal identification with the love of Jesus Christ (and not of it)[14]. For Illich, "the kingdom already exists among us in a social sense, and it consists in the progress of love. Hence, it is profoundly social and personal" (Illich, 2018, p. 85). People of the Way celebrate its presence from the prisons of ancient Rome to the favelas. The West has attempted to improve society, to guarantee its kingdom, and ended up in another room of the same castle. The kingdom of God is not a utopian city, nor will it come at the end of the world. The kingdom of God is neither an ideal to be achieved nor an event to wait for until the parousia, because "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (Mathew 18:20).

In this sense, I can begin to grasp Illich's aphorism, "the kingdom is fulfilled without utopic completion, and it will come about without being apocalyptic" (Illich, 2018, p. 84). Illich, like Paul, celebrated every breaking of the bread and the shared cup of wine as a reliving of the Last Supper.

13 In *Concerning Aesthetic and Religious Experience*, Illich explicitly addresses faith, the Church, and the kingdom as inseparable realities: "the individual can attain faith only through the Church. Church here relates to a community of believers. Psychologically this seems clear; it is not a community of concepts, images or symbols, but the fraternal identification with the form-of-life of a brother and whose expression is 'the kingdom.' And the kingdom is a social reality at a transcendental level. Hence, it cannot be communicated except by means of a communitarian and fraternal form-of-life. Historically, Jesus did so. And today I cannot do this but by means of communion of faith and messianic hope of a fraternal community" (Illich, 2018, p. 87). **N.B.** As also noted by Fabio Milana in his translation of the referred text, the original Spanish uses the term '*vivencia*' which is rendered as 'form-of-life' in the English translation. This is, to say the least, anachronistic.

14 The identification with the love of Jesus Christ is a reference to the new commandment he gave unto his disciples, "that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13,34).

They understood that the Christic Way is not about transforming the world nor escaping from it but celebrating it as it is, open to the labor of love towards my neighbor to whom my bowels turn. As Badiou puts it, "far from fleeing from the century, one must live with it, but without letting oneself be shaped, conformed. It is the subject, rather than the century, who, under the injunction of his faith, must be transformed" (Badiou, 2003, p. 110).

Illich once said that he wanted to celebrate his faith for no purpose at all. Illich has rarely spoken openly about faith. In 1966 he said "faith is not the acceptance of a doctrine; it is the commitment to searching, with dedication and risk, the personal, intimate identification with the intimacy of another person. Rabbi Yeshua ben Josef, as the object of this faith, is my brother and friend Jesus, the Lord, the Son of God" (Illich, 2018, p. 87). Afterwards, in the late 1990's, in conversation with David Cayley, he said:

> Faith is a mode of knowledge which does not base itself on either my worldly experience or the resources of my intelligence. It founds certainty on the word of someone whom I trust and makes this knowledge which is based on trust more fundamental than anything I can know by reason. This, of course, is a possibility only when I believe that God's word can reach me. It makes sense only if the One whom I trust is God.

Could one live by faith in the age of penicillin and retirement pensions? In the age of social and ecological degradation at planetary scale? When the vernacular is systematically destroyed? Could one live by faith in the age of cybernetics when the loss of flesh threatens to extract our bowels? I suggest we read Illich's books as attempts to flesh out, in different historical contexts, the scaffold that renders it increasingly difficult for the subject of his or her time to contemplate faith,

purposeless faith, faith in the event Christ, nothing else. It is useless to elucubrate if it is harder to find faith at the end of the world than any other historical moment, nevertheless, this is the faith of the last Christian.

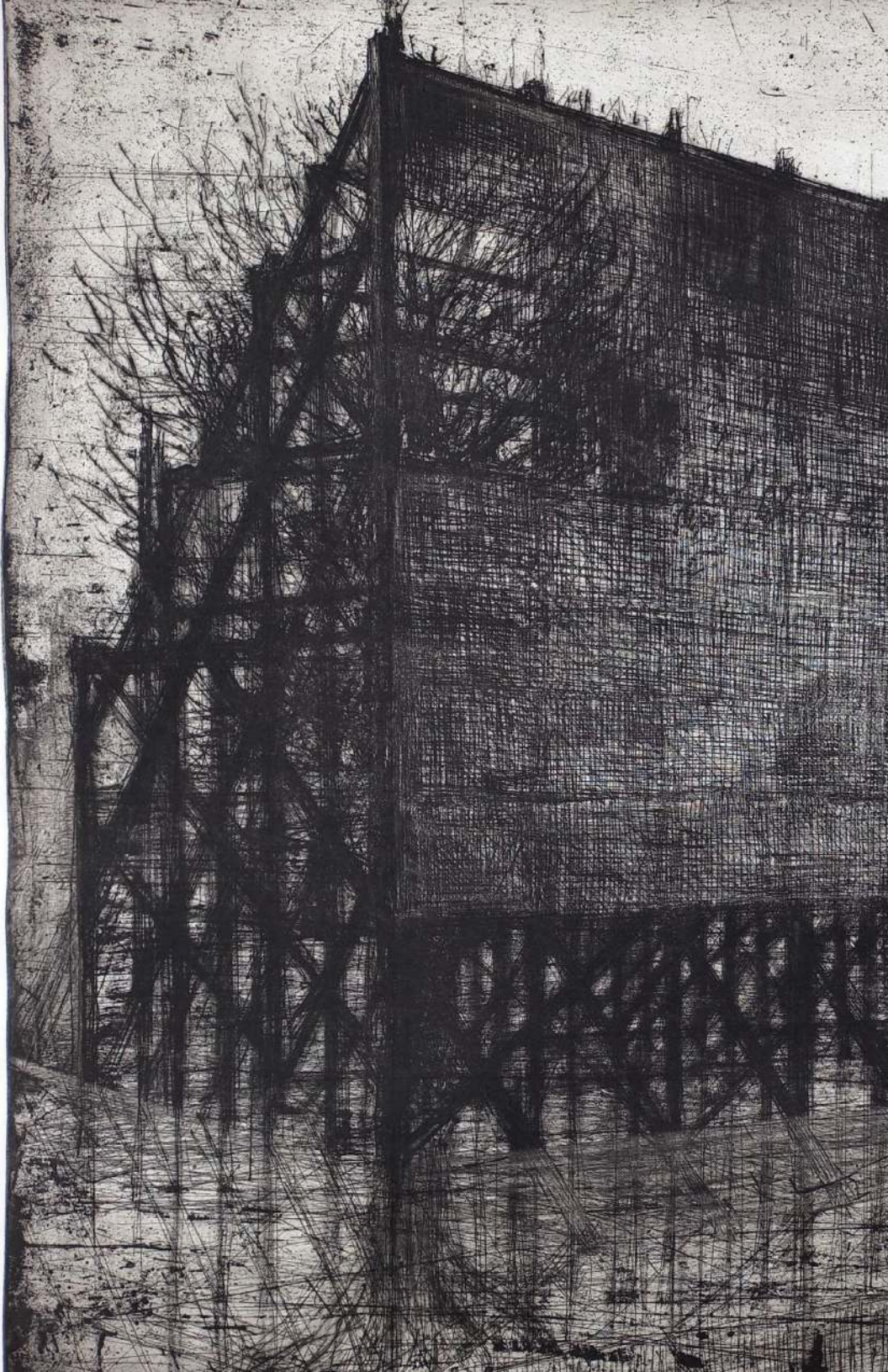
The last shall be the first

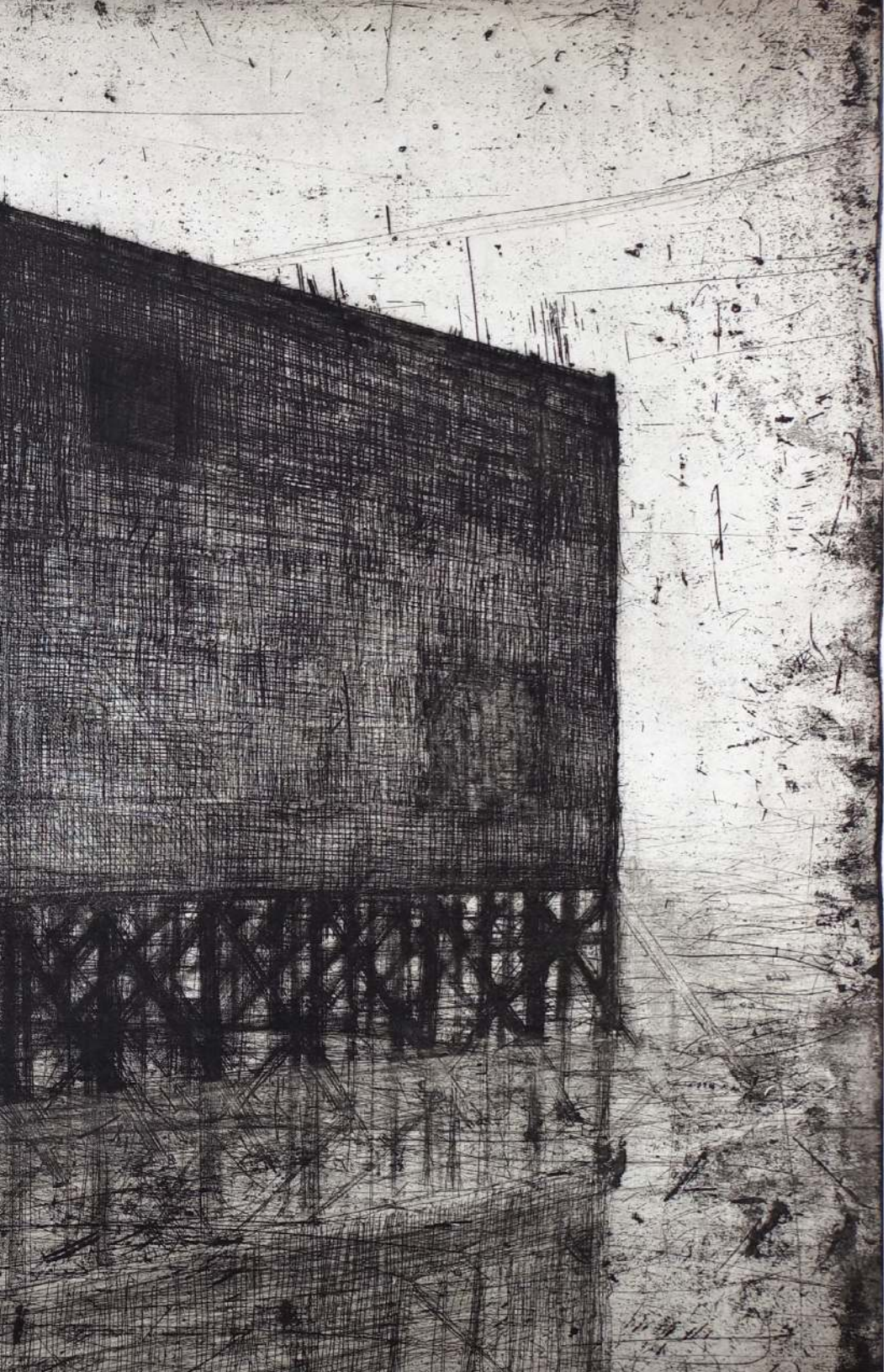
Both Illich and Paul were men of faith; both were faithful to the event Christ. Paul at the beginning of the messianic time whereas Illich at the end. Both confronted the question of how to pass on the Christic Way, Paul at the beginning of the end and Illich at the edge of it. Both had trusted in the gratuity of love and renounced the power to guarantee this relationship.

Perhaps in the Christic Way every last is also the first. At the edge of the end, the last becomes the first when the face of the other remains a surprise, when the event Christ remains potentially new. To follow the nude Christ may mean to take the narrow path of not conforming to this world but renewing one's gaze, especially in the most Christian epoch. Instead, one should live in the kingdom of God in the world as it is. As Illich wrote on his *Commentary on Robert Fox*, "to speak of faith as the celebration of our seeing what is there: letting God be what and who God is." In the case of Fox this was "mostly 'garbage' as he would find out in the twenty-five years on the streets in New York" (Illich, 2018, p. 170). Perhaps to be the last is to find the kingdom in the smog of over-polluted cities and in the remnants of deforestation and gold mining. Perhaps then the last are indeed the first. For those of faith, the best is always present at the worst.

In the time of the end, which is an eternal day, first and last are not temporal terms. They are no longer terms that mark the beginning and end of a sequence but rather, because outside of linear time, a relationship of proximity. They are not merely a reversal of social status and prestige (prince is pauper and pauper is prince).

Instead, first and last are con-temporaries in the time of the end; they are always already at the same moment because they stand under the sun of the eternal day. The con-temporaneity of Paul and Illich is defined by the fact that for both the kingdom is always at hand. This is perhaps the meaning of the eternal day in the tradition from Paul to Illich. No matter how distant we become from the event, the last becomes the first when we are faithful to it.





On Surprise and the Indirectness of the Theological in the Work of Ivan Illich

by Simon Ravenscroft

I strongly suspect that a contemporary art of living can be recovered… The hope for such a life rests upon the rejection of sentimentality and an openness to surprise – Ivan Illich[1]

Introduction: The difficulty of reading Illich

In an address given in 1996, six years before his death, Ivan Illich describes himself as a "hedge-straddler, a *zaunreiter*, which is an old name for a witch".[2] He is referring to his having one foot in his "home ground" of Catholic philosophy, while the other is "dangling on the outside… heavy with mud clots and scented by exotic herbs through which I have tramped".[3] If Illich is often invigorating to read, this 'hedge-straddling' has rarely made him straightforward to interpret. His published writings address a vast range of subjects,[4] and the challenge presented by this polymathic breadth is compounded by the fact that, despite commenting incisively on many issues, it cannot ultimately be said that Illich left behind a unified body of theory. His writings are far more fragmented, marked by key changes in argument and approach over the course of his life, with his final

1 Ivan Illich, *Gender* (London: Marion Boyars, 1983), 179

2 Ivan Illich, "Philosophy… Artifacts… Friendship– –and the History of the Gaze", *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 70 (1996): 59.

3 Illich, "Philosophy… Artifacts… Friendship", 59.

4 An incomplete list would range from the grand themes of the political economy of modern societies, the intellectual and cultural history of the West, and the theological origins of modernity, to the specific topics of development, schooling, healthcare, transport, energy use, technology, work, gender, popular literacy, the history of the senses, materiality and embodiment, and friendship.

Simon Ravenscroft, srr33@cam.ac.uk
Ravenscroft, S. On Surprise and the Indirectness of the Theological in the Work of Ivan Illich.
Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 128-160

meaning often expressed in enigmatic terms, especially in later work. Indeed, his expression was especially enigmatic when it came to his theological commitments, which has left the question of how these relate to his ideas about history, politics, society, and the self, mired in difficulty. There can be no question that these interpretive challenges have hampered Illich's reception in a number of fields. Another factor hampering Illich's reception is the extraordinary success of the earlier writings for which he remains best known. As Giorgio Agamben has written, if the reception of Illich's 1970s work "assured its widespread diffusion and success… it also contributed to its misunderstanding", a consequence of it having been "inscribed without difficulty in the context of the critique of institutions that had characterised the long wave of 1968".[5] As a result, Illich has remained a "very famous thinker who has been kept, nonetheless, obstinately at the margins of academic debate".[6] In this context, what has been needed for some time, especially in English, is a work that conducts a thorough ground-clearing exercise, summarising Illich's life and thought from a broader perspective, relating it to itself, and beginning to develop its significance as a whole for related fields. David Cayley's recent book, *Ivan Illich: An Intellectual Journey*, provides the beginnings of this and should form the basis for other, more focussed studies. In this vein, here I wish to supplement Cayley's own analysis by exploring a theme that he himself does not develop at any length, namely, the significance of the form and style of Illich's work for an interpretation of its meaning.[7]

5 Giorgio Agamben, introduction to *Genere: Per una critica storica dell'uguaglianza*, by Ivan Illich, ed. Fabio Milana, trans. Ettore Caprioli (Milan: Neri Pozza, 2013), §1. Introduction trans. Beniamino Barrese and Simon Ravenscroft.

6 Agamben, introduction, §1.

7 I know that Cayley is familiar with the possibility of reading Illich in this way, however, as we have discussed it together several times.

In what follows, I focus chiefly on what I call Illich's theological indirectness, though his work has other formal and stylistic characteristics that are worth exploring in addition, mentioned throughout. The first part of the essay (sections I-III) deals with matters of interpretation: why and how one might go about reading Illich in such a way that matters of form and style are rendered meaningful, with theology as the chief example. I argue that for the theological aspects of Illich's work to fully resonate, one has to attend to the specific form the theological takes. Illich's theological indirectness has to do with his refusal of a certain kind of ecclesio-juridical power, since secularised in the dominant institutions of Western modernity, and his affirmation of a mode of faith anchored in an openness to surprise and mystery. Illich's ideas do not, in this respect, need to be 'decoded' and expressed in an explicit theological idiom, as some have previously proposed, for them to yield a theological sense. Rather, by emphasising their form and elaborating upon it, this theological sense comes through all the more strongly, and in a way that reveals a greater degree of unity between his theological commitments and his more explicit social, political, and philosophical concerns than may initially be apparent. In the second part of the essay (section IV), I seek to demonstrate this by offering a constructive interpretation of surprise as a unifying theme in his work, showing how the theological here reinforces rather than displaces the social, political, and philosophical aspects of his thinking. Here we see how Illich's theological indirectness, and the open form of his work generally, dovetails with his broader emphasis on relationality, the interpersonal, particularity, and otherness, over against the depersonalising, disembodying, homogenising pressures of late modernity. We also see how this has to do, obliquely, with a cultivated receptivity to the unforced and unexpected appearing of divine grace within the world,

an outlook of faith.[8]

This essay is therefore a proposal for a fresh interpretive approach to Illich, applied here to one specific area of his work, but with general relevance for all of it. I see this as a corrective to several heavy-footed earlier interpretations, discussed in section III, though more as a supplement than a corrective to Cayley's, who in his book intertwines the theological with the social, political, and philosophical with considerable subtlety and sensitivity, placing specific, positive emphasis on points of ambivalence and contradiction.[9] Illich frequently claimed not to speak as a theologian; as Cayley points out, this is a claim that raises ambiguities, which to some extent "[turn] on whether one takes theology to refer to any words about God or only the authoritative pronouncements of authorized theologians".[10] It has also given rise to charges of disingenuousness and dissimulation on Illich's part, or (less alarmingly) a regrettable lack of lucidity.[11] Attending to the indirect form the theological takes in Illich can help avoid such misunderstandings, because it allows the reader to grasp the ambiguities at play in his work without needing to resolve them. As we shall see, when it comes to how Illich deals with the theological, the ambiguities, knots, and tensions do themselves prove peculiarly fruitful.

I. Preamble: Form and Content in Illich

It is helpful to begin with some general remarks on form and content. Why and how does form matter for the task of interpretation? On this, Martha Nussbaum has written

8 This reading of surprise goes further than Cayley's in the direction of a theological and metaphysical account of nature and grace (Cayley explores surprise via the theme of the messianic in Agamben and Benjamin, which I also mention in passing).

9 Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 446-441; 467-468 (and *passim)*.

10 Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 89; cf. 430-434.

11 See Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 122 and 430 (we deal directly with Todd Hartch in section III).

as follows:

> Style itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters. Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content––an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth.[12]

The bifurcation of form and content that Nussbaum rejects here, in which the form in which ideas are expressed is treated as separate from the ideas themselves, is sometimes uncritically assumed in modern ways of reading texts (in much of the analytic tradition, perhaps). It is characteristic of a dualistic aesthetics, utilitarian in the sense that means and ends are separated because form and style are instrumentalised, becoming merely a means of packaging up or embroidering ideas to achieve a certain effect. Form is from this perspective incidental for meaning. One can readily decode the meaning of a poem into linear prose, say, or conceive a novel merely as a vehicle for depicting a certain set of predetermined political or social values in emotionally affecting ways. Nussbaum's position, in contrast, is that content is in a sense *always-already* formal; the way in which something is said, its style and genre, is part of what it says. Mikhail Bakhtin, commenting on the open-ended, polyphonic character of Dostoevsky's novels, wrote that, "Artistic form, correctly understood, does not shape already prepared and found content, but rather permits content to be found and seen for the first time".[13] Nussbaum is of like mind, and therefore continues:

> …this suggests, too, that there may be some views of the

12 Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3.

13 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 43. Bakhtin's argument here can be read as an indirect critique of Socialist Realism.

> world and how one should live in it––views, especially, that emphasize the world's surprising variety, its complexity and mysteriousness, its flawed and imperfect beauty––that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose, a style remarkably flat and lacking in wonder––but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars. Not perhaps, either, in the expositional structure conventional to philosophy, which sets out to establish something and then does so, without surprise, without incident––but only in a form that itself implies that life contains significant surprises…[14]

Nussbaum's focus in the above is on the philosophical significance of literature, but her observations explain generally how form is bound up with meaning, and how particular sorts of meaning are inseparable from certain modes of expression (in a way that cannot be 'decoded' or fully expressed otherwise, though much can of course be said *about* them).

There is already a hint here of why this perspective might be relevant for reading Illich in Nussbaum's reference to surprise, mystery, and attentiveness to particulars, all of which are central concerns of his. It is at least conceivable, noting the above, that some of the features of Illich's body of work that have made it difficult to interpret – such as its non-systematicity or fragmentariness – might be connected with his concern for surprise and mystery. Simply being attentive to this kind of possibility will change the way in which we approach his work. For example, in one essay, Carl Mitcham notes how Illich, "despite fervent views across a complex spectrum of issues, nevertheless often chooses to speak elliptically and circuitously", and adds that in many of Illich's

14 Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 3.

"highly compact" publications, the "extended development of a position is replaced largely by anecdote and allusion".[15] Faced with this apparent difficulty, it can be a temptation for a commentator to want to give Illich's ideas a more systematic or organised presentation, one that will fill in the gaps and tie up the loose ends (as Mitcham then attempts with his own five-fold thematization).[16] While a more systematic presentation may not always be a mistake, there is a risk that one elides the significance of the form and style itself in reformulating Illich's work in this manner. One assumes the form and style are accidental and inconsequential, for example. In his essay, Mitcham does not consider how the elliptical, anecdotal, allusive style of Illich's work might be relevant to its interpretation; how its 'medium' bears upon its 'message'.

The fact that Illich did not write novels or poetry (specifically 'literary' styles) is not the point here. Philosophers – and here I am agreeing with Agamben's suggestion that Illich's work is "genuinely philosophical" – have often used form and style in ways that bear heavily on the interpretation of their ideas, from Plato up to Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, or Adorno.[17] This is true as well of the monastic tradition that we know contributed to Illich's own intellectu-

15 Carl Mitcham, "The Challenges of this Collection", in Hoinacki and Mitcham (eds), *The Challenges of Ivan Illich,* 13-15.

16 Mitcham, "Challenges", 15-18.

17 "If philosophy necessarily implies an interrogation of the humanity and inhumanity of man, then his investigation, as it confronts the fate of humankind in a decisive moment of its history, is genuinely philosophical – and so is his method, 'archaeology', which he develops autonomously from Foucault" (Agamben, introduction, §1). Illich's work is also philosophical in the sense that it amounts to an extended reflection on the nature of the 'good life', and what he sometimes calls the 'art of living'. Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science: An Introduction to the Thought of Theodor W. Adorno* (London: Verso, 2014); Miles Hollingworth, *Ludwig Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

al formation: one's entire interpretation of the role and purpose of Anselm's so-called 'ontological' argument in the *Prosologion* can rest on the significance one places on the form of the text as a prayer and spiritual exercise.[18] David Cayley has noted how Illich was formed in the theological milieu of *ressourcement*.[19] One of the key figures in that movement, Henri de Lubac, explains his preference for a fragmentary style in *Paradoxes of Faith* as follows:

> If the expression of a thought is inevitably partial, in the sense that it is incomplete, its elaboration in connected discourse may sometimes mislead and make it appear partial in the other sense of the word. It is hope that such a risk will in some measure be avoided by a fragmentary presentation. How can fragments be otherwise than incomplete?[20]

De Lubac had his own challenges with the Roman Catholic hierarchy over the course of his life, and his theological imaginary does, I think, resonate with Illich's in important ways (including with respect to paradox and faith and the relation between nature and grace, themes explored below). The quotation above gives one brief explanation as to why more modest and perhaps interpretively difficult forms might, for considered theological and philosophical reasons, be preferred over a drive for absolute clarity in systematic prose; namely, that one's work not be misread as a totalising system, but instead express the provisional and unfinished nature of

18 Regarding Anselm, one can compare an analytic, 'rationalist' interpretation of the ontological argument with that of Karl Barth and perhaps most convincingly that of someone like Marilyn McCord Adams, "Praying the Proslogion: Anselm's Theological Method," 13-39 in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*, ed. Thomas D. Senor (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995). See further below for the monastic resonances in Illich.

19 Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 64-65.

20 de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 7.

any search for and statement of truth.

There are a range of formal characteristics in Illich's work that merit extended reflection in this context. Given Illich's own emphasis on, for example, particularity, it would make sense for him to resist any kind of universalising drift in his own writings. Deploying elliptical formulations, anecdote, and allusion, as Mitcham outlined above, would all contribute to that. Others include the *ad hoc* and occasional character of many of his publications – the fact they issued from specific invitations, collaborations, personal or cultural moments – or their open-endedness, including in Illich's explicit reluctance, especially in later writings, to offer definitive 'answers' to the social, cultural, existential problems his critiques brought to light.[21] An exhaustive analysis is well beyond the remit of this essay, and in what follows, I focus on Illich's theological indirectness. By 'theological indirectness' I mean both Illich's renunciation of direct theological speech – that is, his refusal after a certain point in his life to develop theological ideas in explicitly theological terms – as well as his tendency to gesture to theological themes obliquely while addressing other topics. A specific example will help to illustrate what I mean by this.[22]

Illich's 1988 book written with Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind*, is explicitly about changes in perception that resulted from the development of alphabetised language, the book, and growth in public literacy. It deals in particular with the historical transition from oral to written cultures. Obliquely and in fragments, however, *ABC* also draws attention to a contemporary shift from writ-

21 The last line of *The Rivers North of the Future* is, "I hope nobody takes what I said for answers" (Ivan Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich, as Told to David Cayley*, w/David Cayley [Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2005], 229). See also Ivan Illich and Barry Sanders, *ABC: The Alphabetization of the Popular Mind* (London: Marion Boyars, 1988), ix-x; Illich, *Gender*, 179; and there are other examples of different kinds. See also Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 431: "he refused to prescribe for society generally".

22 Illich himself lists some others in "Philosophy… Artifacts… Friendship", 62-63.

ten culture to one of information systems. The apparent subtext is the impact of this shift, in language and the popular imaginary, on social relations. As the book draws to a close, Illich and Sanders warn in this regard of ways of perceiving that reduce "an encounter with another person into an exchange of information between two elements of a system".[23] In the postscript, they discuss different senses of the personal pronoun 'we', and explore the notion of a contemporary "analytic we", which is abstract, depersonalised, and devoid of specificity.[24] With this in the background, in the last line of the book, Illich and Sanders raise directly for the first time the theme of friendship, and convey their hope that the space of friendship may remain open in an age of systems and the 'analytic we'.[25] In a note beneath, the reader is referred for a definition of friendship to the book's epigraph, which is a letter of the twelfth century theologian Hugh of St Victor, left untranslated in Latin and undiscussed in the main text, on the subject of *caritas* (love/charity).[26] The attentive reader is left with the impression that this book about the cultural history of writing and literacy has been gesturing all along at questions about human relationality and the loss of the personal in the present day, and moreover that these latter themes are theologically inflected. One cannot, however, be sure about the details: Illich and Sanders leave them merely as gestures.

We will return to *ABC* below, but in cases like this, it is tempting simply to try to render Illich's meaning (theological or otherwise) in plainer terms. However, if the meaningfulness of the elliptical style itself, and its relevance for Illich's

23 Illich and Sanders, *ABC*, 114-115.

24 Illich and Sanders, *ABC*, 120-127.

25 Illich and Sanders, *ABC*, 127.

26 The passage is later included, with translation, in Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's* Didascalicon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 26n53.

ideas, is overlooked in this process, then something important will inevitably be lost. To understand why we must look more closely at Illich's way of dealing with the theological.

II. Reading Illich theologically: An interpretive paradox

Illich's attitude to theological discourse is rendered complex by his biography. For much of his life, and partly in response to his strained relations with the Catholic hierarchy, Illich deliberately veiled this dimension of his thinking. In the late-1960s, while still an active priest, Illich was called to the Vatican to answer certain questionable charges made against him arising from his activities in Latin America. At the time, he refused to defend himself, and although no formal punishment ensued, he subsequently renounced his priestly ministry and from then on largely refrained from direct theological speech.[27] As he says in 1996, "I did not want to be taken for a proselytizer, a fundamentalist –– or worse", he adds sarcastically, "a Catholic theologian; I do not have that mission".[28] Even in later works, in which he refers openly to Christianity's role in shaping Western modernity, he insists that he speaks as an historian, albeit also a believer, rather than as a theologian.[29] David Cayley handles this well in his recent book, criticising in particular the notion that Illich was somehow disingenuous in the way he dealt with theological matters. He did not "write in secret ciphers", Cayley argues, and insofar as he sometimes shrouded his 'ultimate motive', "this expressed only discretion not deception".[30] I agree, but want to add further subtlety to Cayley's account, by exploring how the indi-

27 See Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 73-93; Francine du Plessix Gray, *Divine Disobedience: Profiles in Catholic Radicalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), 231-321.

28 Illich, "Philosophy… Artifacts… Friendship", 63.

29 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 48; Ivan Illich, *Ivan Illich in Conversation*, w/David Cayley (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1992), 242; and see below.

30 Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 430-432.

rect form theology takes in his work is meaningful in itself and in ways that resonate with ideas that he did express more explicitly.

An unusually candid statement of Illich's to this effect occurs in an interview with Jean-Marie Domenach in 1972 for French television. Domenach notes that Illich has not "mentioned the name of Christ", and asks, "Is that on purpose?" Illich replies:

> Well, you see, I don't like to speak about my friends in a superficial way. And, to take it one step further, I think that nowadays, people tend to use the name of God in vain, usually to justify something. *I would rather make it known that I love him without talking about it.* It's almost impossible to do that these days without getting trapped in very dangerous ambiguities.[31]

Cryptic as this comment remains, it is one of Illich's clearest admissions that his unwillingness to speak in overtly theological terms had a specifically theological rationale: to resist using the name of God as a means of justification, which he implies would be a kind of blasphemy (or misappropriation of divine power). Illich was well aware that he could make known his faith or devotion without being explicit about it, and this was to be his preferred path: "I would rather make it known that I love him without talking about it".

We can develop this thought further with reference to one of Illich's conversations with David Cayley, in which Cayley raises Lee Hoinacki's suggestion (to which we return below) that Illich might be "doing theology in a new way". Cayley points out that Illich describes himself conspicuously as an historian rather than a theologian, and Illich responds

31 Ivan Illich, "*Un Certain Regard*: Ivan Illich", w/Jean-Marie Domenach, television interview (RTF, Paris, 1972), http://vimeo.com/66948476, unpaged. Transcript trans. Clarke Mackey and Marty Kent. My emphasis.

with a comment about authority: if he were speaking as a theologian, he says, he would "start from revelation which you must accept before you can follow me".[32] The conversation continues:

> CAYLEY: So the position of the historian is part of your embraced powerlessness.
> ILLICH: Yes! That you got right!
> CAYLEY: It seems to me that in a way, your work is a form of iconoclasm, a form of image-breaking that clears the way for surprise and for mystery.
> ILLICH: For mystery and what in the Old Testament tradition we call the attempt to walk beneath his nose. *In facie tua*...
> CAYLEY: I don't know the phrase. Beneath the nose of God?
> ILLICH: Yes, beneath the nose of God. God has a nose as big as mine, seemingly…[33]

In giving up direct theological speech, then, Illich was distancing himself from a particular kind of institutional authority but doing so precisely in order to nurture the kind of openness to surprise and mystery that he regarded as a necessary feature of the life of faith, or the attempt to 'walk beneath the nose of God'. In other words, he demurs from speaking theologically in order, paradoxically, to make room for God.

The position just summarised implies that, for Illich, direct theological speech might to some extent be antithetical to that openness to surprise and mystery that he regard-

32 Illich, *In Conversation*, 241. Cf. "For thirty years I have declined to speak as a theologian because, in the Roman Catholic Church's more recent tradition, one thereby claims an institutional authority" (Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 48). For a useful sense of what might be meant by 'mystery' here, not simply as the unexplored or unknown, but as luminous, inexplorable enigma, see de Lubac, *Paradoxes of Faith*, 60-61.

33 Illich, *In Conversation,* 242. Cf. Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 431.

ed as essential to faith, which is to say an obstacle ultimately to the experience of God. This is an important reason for thinking through the significance of the indirect form of the theological in his work, because evidently, it was neither accidental nor incidental. Considered together with his cryptic remarks to Domenach, it seems that Illich understood well the risks inherent in theological discourse, in the sense of it being potentially a rather dubious and indeed dangerous exercise. Silence, the refusal of theological speech, can be pregnant with meaning in this context, especially bearing in mind Illich's own biography.[34]

In one place Illich associates his posture of embraced powerlessness with an old ascetical Christian saying, to be "nakedly following the naked Christ".[35] This saying has its origin in St Jerome and signifies an acceptance of human fragility and refusal of earthly power for the sake of trust in God, in imitation of Jesus of Nazareth. The connection between Illich and Jerome has been explored in a short essay by Domenico Farias.[36] Therein, Farias links the shape of Illich's life and work with a longer passage from Jerome that concludes with John 12:24, "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit".[37] I agree with Farias that this verse is key to understanding Illich, and specifically the paradoxical way he dealt with the theological after his disputes with the Vatican: that in giving it up, it would return many times over. The movement, as Farias rightly identifies, is of that which "saves

34 Illich wrote early on about the 'eloquence of silence' (Ivan Illich, *Celebration of Awareness: A Call to Institutional Revolution* [London: Calder and Boyars, 1971], 41-52).

35 Illich, *In Conversation*, 283.

36 Domenico Farias, "In the Shadow of Jerome", in Lee Hoinacki and Carl Mitcham (eds.), *The Challenges of Ivan Illich* (Albany: SUNY Press 2002), 59–70.

37 Farias, "Shadow of Jerome", 65-66.

itself by appearing to lose itself".[38] The point of this for reading Illich is that his work does not need to be made 'explicitly' theological as some (below) have proposed; rather, it must be read in and through its theologically indirect form for its theological meaning to resonate in its full paradoxicality, reflecting this cardinal paradox of faith.[39] In short, in Illich, the theological returns as it is given up.

To begin to fathom the theological depth of Illich's work, therefore, one must attend to the indirect form the theological takes. The fruit this yields will become more apparent towards the end of this essay, but it demands a different order of attention from the reader, one less concerned with how to make his work instrumentally useful, whether for building a social programme, a critical theory, or indeed a theological or philosophical system. To appreciate the difference of this approach, it will help to contrast it with another method for dealing with the theological in Illich, first proposed by Lee Hoinacki.

III. Misreadings

A question lurking in the background of this essay so far is to what extent it is the task of the interpreter to render Illich's ideas in explicitly theological terms. Here, I have in mind a specific response to Illich's work first proposed by his friend,

38 Farias, "Shadow of Jerome", 59.

39 This paradoxical movement of faith is given famous expression by Johannes de Silentio (Søren Kierkegaard) in *Fear and Trembling*. Here, for the 'knight of faith', renunciation is merely the staging post for non-identical return, by virtue of the absurd: "By faith I do not renounce anything; on the contrary, by faith I receive everything exactly in the sense in which it is said that one who has faith like a mustard seed can move mountains. …By faith Abraham did not renounce Isaac, but by faith Abraham received Isaac. By virtue of resignation, that rich young man should have given away everything, but if he had done so, then the knight of faith would have said to him: By virtue of the absurd, you will get every penny back again – –believe it!" (Søren Kierkegaard [Johannes de Silentio], "Fear and Trembling", in *Fear and Trembling / Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong [Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983], 48-49).

Lee Hoinacki, and drawn on more recently by Todd Hartch. Hoinacki held that Illich was doing theology in a 'new way', which he considered a kind of apophatic or negative mode.[40] He writes,

> In the books and articles published after 1970, Illich proceeded in an apophatic mode out of which he gradually emerged toward the end of his life… Illich wrote as a theologian...his books were really apophatic explorations about God, the Church, and the believer's movement toward God.[41]

Thus, *Deschooling Society* is described by way of example as "principally a theological study of the Christian life, not a sociological analysis of schools".[42] To read Illich as an apophatic theologian, according to Hoinacki, is to claim that when he was writing about, say, schools, he was only doing so on a surface level; he was really, underneath this, concerned with God and with faith. "Ignorant of this perspective", Hoinacki writes, "a reader can achieve only a superficial understanding of Illich's writings".[43] The idea that there is some kind of secret religious message in Illich's work has been adopted by Todd Hartch who, following Hoinacki, claims that Illich "obscured his apophatic writings by using social and political critique as a sort of code", describing this as a kind of "camouflage" that concealed a "hidden purpose".[44] By implication, on this view

40 Apophaticism is that form of theology that speaks of God only via negation, or by saying what God is not.

41 Lee Hoinacki, "The Trajectory of Ivan Illich", *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society* 23 (2003),384-5.

42 Hoinacki, "Trajectory", 385.

43 Hoinacki, "Trajectory", 384.

44 Todd Hartch, *The Prophet of Cuernevaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 146-157. Hartch briefly approaches a better framing of this issue when discussing some comments of James Morton, but his ex-

a fulsome theological reading of Illich would literally consist in a process of decryption or decoding, which would displace the 'superficial', 'secular' content of his work for the sake of the 'real', 'religious' content.

It is important to acknowledge that Hoinacki and Hartch are wrestling with an issue of some subtlety here, but there are at least two major related problems with their framing of it. The first is that it fundamentally misrepresents the apophatic tradition in Christian theology and the metaphysical principles from which it draws its sense. Apophaticism has simply never been about encoded or camouflaged theology, such that one's reflections appear to be about one topic but with a concealed religious message. In Pseudo-Dionysius, for example, by confessing that God is *not* like any finite thing, the apophatic or negative mode is a way of affirming the absolute ontological difference between God and the created order, while also acknowledging the paradox that God may to some extent be spoken about indirectly through all finite things, because all finite things are held in being God as their cause.[45] Illich's own reflections on creation and contingency in *Rivers North of the Future* indicate that he was familiar with the metaphysical framework behind this.[46] Among other things, apophaticism provides a helpful example of where theolog-

planation is generally muddled, and as Cayley says comes close to accusing Illich of an "inept and clouded esotericism that confused even his friends", an account which I agree is "partial, obtuse, and strangely unsympathetic" (Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 430).

45 "…as for the Super-Essence of the Supreme Godhead… it is not lawful to any lover of that Truth which is above all truth to celebrate It as Reason or Power or Mind or Life or Being, but rather as most utterly surpassing all condition, movement, life, imagination, conjecture, name, discourse, thought, conception, being, rest, dwelling, union, limit, infinity, everything that exists. And yet since, as the Subsistence of goodness, It, by the very fact of Its existence, is the Cause of all things, in celebrating the bountiful Providence of the Supreme Godhead we must draw upon the whole creation… Conscious of this, the Sacred Writers celebrate It by every Name while yet they call It Nameless" (Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names*, trans. C.E. Rolt [Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004], I§5; 60-61).

46 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 64-79.

ical 'content' is very evidently formal, given that one cannot develop a negative theology except in the negative mode. It is precisely this intertwining of form and content that is lost in Hoinacki and Hartch's emphasis on theological codes, since the point of decoding is to dispense with the original form by deciphering the meaningful content hidden within.

This leads to a second, connected point: Hoinacki and Hartch's approach also neglects the intrinsic significance of Illich's *own* mode of theological indirectness which, as suggested above, 'speaks' paradoxically to his posture of embraced powerlessness as an expression of faith anchored in an openness to surprise and mystery. The point is not that many of Illich's writings are superficially 'secular' and could be rewritten in an explicit theological idiom, but that the indirect theological form is itself theologically disclosive. To put it another way, something like a literary rather than technological hermeneutic is needed. Moreover, it is itself entirely consistent with the apophatic tradition properly understood that Illich could write about all manner of things and *still all the same* be talking about God, without one ever needing to displace the original content, because the apophatic tradition teaches that God can be spoken about indirectly through all finite things. This is something Illich would have well understood given the extent of his own theological education and his familiarity and indeed affinity with medieval monastic thought especially.[47] It brings the argument full circle in the sense that we can therefore say that Illich's way of dealing with the theological *is* consistent with apophaticism, and *for that reason* his work does not need to be theologically decoded, but its theological sense only (if anything) elaborated upon. This has nothing to do with Illich having been disingenuous; it is an entirely con-

47 Most fulsomely expressed perhaps in his book on Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon*, *In the Vineyard of the Text*, but also in many places in *Ivan Illich in Conversation* and *Rivers North of the Future*.

sistent way of dealing with theological matters, which aligns with an important, albeit subtle and easily misunderstood, trajectory of thinking within the Christian tradition.

In grasping these principles, it can become clearer how Illich's theological indirectness, and the theological commitments that lie behind it, reinforce rather than displace the social, political, and philosophical commitments that are more explicitly stated in his work. This interpretative approach therefore has the potential to reveal a much greater degree of unity in Illich's work than has typically been apparent, albeit that this unity emerges in and through – rather than in spite of – its somewhat oblique, open, and fragmentary form. I will demonstrate this by elaborating upon one central, consistent theme of his: the emphasis upon surprise, which is intertwined with his persistent concern for the interpersonal, and has deep theological resonance.

IV. On Surprise

a. Mutuality and incarnation

Despite its thematic and stylistic diversity, across his body of published writings Illich shows a consistent concern for the erosion of social bonds under the conditions of economic modernity. Whether writing of "society-wide obstacles to mutual presence", of that which "isolates people from each other [and] undermines the texture of community", or of conviviality, friendship, and the conditions for enhancing the ability "to tend and care and wait upon the other", much of his thought revolves around the fate of the interpersonal in the modern era.[48] This is also for Illich clearly a theological issue: it has to do, as he said in a late paper, with "those char-

48 Ivan Illich, *Toward a History of Needs* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), xii; Ivan Illich, *Tools For Conviviality* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1975), 11; Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (London: Marion Boyars, 2002), 116.

acteristics in contemporary artefacts that need to be faced fearlessly as issues of charity" – charity being conceived here not in its modern usage as unilateral philanthropic gesture but in its traditional Catholic sense as love and social bond.[49] He has sought, he says, to "dispel the illusion that power or organisation can ever enhance the practice of charity".[50] This dovetails of course with his historical argument about the institutionalisation of charity: that the formalising, depersonalising, alienating, atomising pressures that to a large extent determine modern institutions have their ambiguous origins in the Church's own much earlier attempts to give "this-worldly power, social visibility, and permanence to the performance of ortho-doxy, right faith, and to the performance of Christian charity".[51] Illich reads modernity as an "extension of Church history" in this sense.[52]

At the same time, insofar as Illich's work is also, as described above, "a form of image-breaking that clears the way for surprise and for mystery", and for the "attempt to walk beneath" the nose of God, it is also concerned (theologically) with how to practice conviviality and mutual presence in the here and now. In this regard, the fate of charity, the question of the *quality* of our social relations, is for Illich of urgent ethical and existential importance. This too is part of what it means to face contemporary artefacts "fearlessly as issues of charity", and is what gives much of his work its distinctive sense of immediacy: "What can I do", he asks in one place, "at this very moment, in the unique *hic et nunc*, here and now, in which I am? What can I do to get out of this world of need-satisfac-

49 Illich, "Philosophy... Artifacts... Friendship", 63; Simon Ravenscroft, "Modernity and the Economics of Gift and Charity: On Ivan Illich's Critique of Abstract Philanthropy", *Telos* 174 (2016), 167-168.

50 Illich, "Philosophy... Artifacts... Friendship", 62.

51 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 179.

52 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 169.

tion... and feel free to hear, to sense, to intuit what the other wants from me…?"[53]

Why is the category of surprise so relevant in this context? For this, one has to appreciate the connection Illich draws between surprise, otherness, and personal relationality, informed by central features of the Christian theological imaginary. In a late interview with Majid Rahnema, Illich argues that "neither navel-gazing nor flight from the city" are appropriate responses to contemporary challenges, but "only a risky presence to the Other, together with openness to an absent loved third"; however, he warns that there is no possibility of achieving this "so long as the candle near our samovar stands for 'everyone'".[54] The personal, the particular, and the embodied are, in other words, essential. "The most destructive effect of development", he goes on, "is its tendency to distract my eye from your face with the phantom, humanity, that I ought to love". This 'phantom' is humanity reduced to a universalizable, predictable abstraction, for which "the I who experiences is replaced by an abstract point where many different statistical charts intersect".[55] These remarks provide useful context for understanding one of Illich's more programmatic statements in *The Rivers North of the Future*:

> Only by taking the predictability out of the face of the other can I be surprised by him. And this is what I've tried to do. I've tried to encourage people to envision this possibility – even when I couldn't talk to them explicitly

53 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 222.

54 Ivan Illich, "Twenty-Six Years Later: Ivan Illich in Conversation with Majid Rahnema", in Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree (eds), *The Post-Development Reader* (London: Zed Books, 1997), 106. The practice of lighting a candle to represent the other (who may be Christ) when meeting with friends is something Illich seems to have borrowed from Aelred of Rievaulx (Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 150-151).

55 Illich, "Twenty-Six Years Later", 106.

about who my model is.[56]

In other words, Illich understood his work as concerned with restoring a sense of surprise and mystery – we might say 'wonder' – to the embodied encounter with another person, by reinforcing the idea that in their uniqueness and particularity they are irreducible to any abstract characterisation.

His 'model', in the immediate context of the quotation, is the incarnate Christ. The incarnation, Illich says, is "something which to ordinary human reasoning is absurd"; as such, it "is a surprise, remains a surprise, and could not exist as anything else".[57] Moreover, it "makes possible a surprising and entirely new flowering of love and knowledge";[58] it can, in other words, be 'prolonged', for "just as God became flesh and in the flesh relates to each one of us", he says, "so you are capable of relating in the flesh".[59] This has to do with the possibility of seeing uniquely in anyone, regardless of *ethnos* or other categorisation, the "face of Christ",[60] and each such meeting repeats differently or non-identically that archetypal surprise of the incarnation, which is to say that the incarnation is, as it were, gathered up into it. The experience of time here is not linear and homogenous but kairotic: to pilfer from Benjamin, every instant is "the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter".[61] An essential feature of the "unimaginable and unpredictable horizon" that Illich calls faith, therefore, is a kind of disciplined openness to otherness, and a cul-

56 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 57.

57 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 57.

58 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 47-49.

59 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 207.

60 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 56.

61 Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), 255; cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom*, trans. Leland De La Durantaye (London: Seagull Books, 2012); Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 267-271.

tivated receptivity to surprise in the present moment.[62] Such a mode of attention necessarily includes a refusal to regard the other simply as a predictable instance of some generic, abstract 'humanity', and a critical attitude to institutional and technological modes of thinking and acting that would shape perception in the latter direction, and so become means by which we "distract ourselves from becoming fully present to those close enough to touch".[63]

There is striking continuity between these later comments on surprise, the other, and the incarnation and some of Illich's earliest theological remarks made while he was still a practising priest. In a piece from 1967 in which he appraises the role of the Church in relation to programmes of development, Illich comments, "the Christian wants to remain free to find through the gospel a dimension of effective surprise beyond and above the humanistic reason which motivated social action".[64] This entails "faith in the other rather than prediction".[65] The significance of the incarnation, in this context, is that it enables one to affirm "the autonomy of the ludicrous in the face of the useful, of the gratuitous as opposed to the purposeful, of the spontaneous as opposed to the rationalised and planned".[66] "We cannot", he says, "*plan* our way to humanity".[67] Here we see how Illich's theological emphasis upon surprise, even in this early work, opens out to a thoroughgoing social, political, and indeed philosophical attitude, in critical opposition to the 'rationalist social planning' that he

62 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 57. Cf. Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 406-407.

63 Illich, "Twenty-Six Years Later", 106.

64 Ivan Illich, *The Powerless Church and Other Selected Writings: 1955-1985*, assembled Valentina Borremans and Sajay Samuel (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 138.

65 Illich, *Powerless Church*, 136.

66 Illich, *Powerless Church,* 139.

67 Illich, *Powerless Church*, 136.

associated with the development agenda. This 'ludicrous' posture (from *ludo*, to play) has, as Giorgio Agamben has recently highlighted, a distinct note of levity about it.[68] Here we might also recall Illich's description of his institute in Mexico around this same time as being "a free club for the search of surprise... where we are chiefly concerned with becoming humorists".[69] We will return to the theme of levity below in the conclusion.

What becomes ever clearer in Illich's later work, however, is that in a late-modern context this ludicrous openness to surprise in the present moment also demands a serious kind of *askesis*: "We have to engage in an asceticism", he says in one place, "that makes it possible to savour now-ness and here-ness – here is a place, here is that which is between us, as the Kingdom is… if we are to save what remains in us of a sense of meaning, of metaphor, of flesh, of touch, of gaze".[70] He says elsewhere, "By *askesis* I mean the acquisition of habits that foster contemplation. For the believer, contemplation means the conversion to God's human face".[71]

To revisit the question of form against this background, we can venture that Illich's giving up of direct theological speech – and indeed other related stylistic characteristics, such as his refusal to offer final 'answers' – constitute a kind of literary *askesis* for the keeping open of this readiness for surprise. By refusing to explicitly and exhaustively explicate itself, his work resists reduction to a totalising system, expresses the provisionality of its own project, and remains open to that which is not itself, to a future that he preferred to leave "in the hands of God", and to the

68 Giorgio Agamben, "Laughter and the Kingdom", foreword to Illich, *Powerless Church*, vii-xii.

69 Plessix Gray, *Divine Disobedience*, 282;

70 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 182.

71 Illich, "Philosophy... Artifacts... Friendship", 59.

activity and "extraordinary creativity" of his readers.[72] This indirect and open-ended style is oriented towards dialogue and mutuality, in other words, and against what we might call (after Bakhtin) the monological, authoritarian word that brooks no response and no exception, whether that be ecclesiastical and theological in character, or economic, scientific, political, or technological. With a book like *ABC* that we mentioned above, therefore, one can observe an essential coherence between its underlying concern for relationality and friendship, and its enigmatic and gestural form, including with respect to the theological. This is one reason why the question of form is so important in Illich, because his use of form and style can be read as consistent in generative ways with his central concerns. All of this, moreover, is something in which the reader in a certain sense participates. We might see this as an aspect of what Farias meant when, referring to the difficulty Illich presents for ordinary readers, he writes that they cannot escape "the labor and risks of a hermeneutic leap".[73] If complete answers are not found in abstract form in Illich's texts, then they must be found out in the world, in the embodied, lived encounter with another: one task of Illich's readers is to grasp this point, else they fall into a "misplaced concreteness".[74]

b. Nature and grace

We can develop the theological background to this little further, for insofar as the horizon of faith has to do, for Illich, with a readiness to be surprised by that which escapes our prior formulations and expectations, it draws obliquely

72 Illich, *In Conversation*, 217; 117.

73 Farias, "Shadows of Jerome", 59.

74 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 178, 210; *In Conversation*, 287.

on a traditional Catholic conception of the world as contingent in gratuitous but non-arbitrary ways upon God.[75] In *The Rivers North of the Future*, Illich explains how, perceived within this frame, "The world which is around me, the cat over there and the four red roses which bloomed during the night are a gift, something which is a grace".[76] Implicit in this quotation is a specific theological and metaphysical formulation of the relation between nature and grace, namely that grace is related to nature intrinsically rather than extrinsically. That is, grace does not impose itself upon nature arbitrarily from outside but rather is mysteriously manifest within it as the spark of the divine. From this perspective— and this is one place where Illich is close to Henri de Lubac —the supernatural is at the heart of the natural as that which is most real within it, holding it in existence; the extra-ordinary is at the heart of the ordinary.[77] Paradoxically, however, this 'extra' is not simply 'given' but can only be received as a surprising gift, as a grace. Faith entails a readiness to be surprised to encounter grace in the world in this way, through innumerable, seemingly mundane specificities, from which nothing is excluded as 'merely' or 'purely' natural, since all creation is graced. Illich knew all this: he speaks of the "aliveness" of nature when it is perceived as resting contingently in divine hands, linked "with the constant creative activity of God".[78] These finite mediations are however always necessarily *indirect* encounters with the divine, since – as per the apophatic tradition above – divinity

75 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 64-70.

76 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future,* 65.

77 For a good treatment of de Lubac on this point and the debate generally, see John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (London: SCM Press, 2005), especially 5-6.

78 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 69. Illich delineates a shift in the meaning of contingency after Aquinas in Franciscan theology towards arbitrariness and divine voluntarism, which helps to pave the way for modernity, an aspect of his historical narrative that shares ground with de Lubac, Milbank, and others.

is infinite and other and therefore ultimately *un*like any finite thing, despite being bound up intimately with it, holding it in being. Illich argues that in its best expression contingency pertains to a realm of divine gratuity that is reducible neither to the arbitrariness of chance nor causal necessity.[79] One encounters divine grace in partial and enigmatic ways, then, and must simply be open to being surprised by it; one cannot force it into being or produce it by human power, nor specify it absolutely. This would be hubris.

Illich's focus on personal and particular encounters as at any moment being a surprising means of grace makes particular sense against this background. Illich comments on how in a Christian conception, the practice of virtue requires divine help, "God's help of grace", and that "any reasonable reader of the Gospel will understand that that help comes to me through the other who faces me".[80] As such, for Illich, "the neighbour, the stranger, the man on the road are reminders that our lives are enveloped by grace, that love, even salvation, is an event that appears unexpectedly".[81] We should add that it is not only in these occasional encounters, but also in the cultivation of the more persistent bonds of friendship and convivial community that this applies for Illich, given his strong emphasis on these. Indeed, his celebratory affirmation of human life is also best understood in this context: his call to "enjoy consciously, ritually, openly, the permission to be alive at this moment, with all our pains and with all our miseries", bears out his faith in the graced character of human

79 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 49.

80 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 95.

81 Eric Gregory and Leah Hunt-Hendrix, "Enfleshment and the Time of Ethics: Taylor and Illich on the Parable of the Good Samaritan", in Carlos D. Colorado and Justin D. Klassen (eds), *Aspiring to Fullness in a Secular Age: Essays on Religion and Theology in the Work of Charles Taylor* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 235.

existence, with all its joys and sorrows.[82] Already in 1967 he had written that the significance of the incarnation was "an ability to say one great 'Yes' to the experience of life".[83] Insofar as Illich advocates a kind of asceticism, therefore, we see that this is by no means puritanical or life-denying, but provides a framework precisely within which to celebrate life, beyond mere utilitarian usefulness; as he says, "a sense of being able to celebrate the present and celebrate it by *using* it as little as possible".[84] What I have called Illich's literary *askesis* is oriented towards this kind of openness to the present moment, too.

c. Form and critique

So much for the positive account of faith. There is of course the other side to this coin, suggested when Illich describes his call to celebrate the 'permission to be alive at this moment' as "an antidote to despair or religiosity – religiosity of that very evil kind".[85] The corruption of Christianity that Illich regards as synonymous with the emergence of Western modernity has to do with the "decision to make faith into something that is subject to the power of the world".[86] This is the story of the institutionalisation of charity most fully set out in *The Rivers North of the Future*, with all its apocalyptical overtones around the *mysterium iniquitatis*. If we return to Illich's earlier conversation with Cayley quoted in section II above, though, we find Illich already describing how this per-

82 Illich, *In Conversation*, 284.

83 Illich, *Powerless Church*, 139. This chimes once again with the dynamics of faith as described in *Fear and Trembling*: "it takes a paradoxical and humble courage to grasp the whole temporal realm now by virtue of the absurd, and this is the courage of faith" (Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling", 49).

84 Illich, *In Conversation*, 282-283. My emphasis.

85 Illich, *In Conversation,* 284.

86 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 57.

spective has informed his thinking:

> my work is an attempt to accept with great sadness the fact of Western culture. Dawson has a passage where he says that the Church is Europe and Europe is the Church, and I say *yes! Corruptio optimi quae est pessima*. Through the attempt to insure, to guarantee, to regulate Revelation, the best becomes the worst.[87]

He is left "with a sense of profound ambiguity":

> I cannot do without tradition, but I have to recognise that its institutionalisation is the root of an evil deeper than any evil I could have known with my unaided eyes and mind. This is what I would call the West. By studying and accepting the West as the perversion of Revelation, I become increasingly tentative, but also more curious and totally engaged in searching for its origin, which is the voice of him who speaks.[88]

We should remember that Illich articulates this in the context of his explanation as to why he takes the position of an historian rather than of a theologian, even while continuing to search for 'the voice of him who speaks'. For Illich, the seemingly benevolent but depersonalising and brutalising structures of modern society are rooted in a corruption of, a kind of unfaithfulness to, Christian ideals that began in the Church, in the attempt to make faith and charity subject to 'the power of the world'. His refusal of direct theological speech is part of his renunciation and critique of this claim to power and control.

In his interview with Jean-Marie Domenach in 1972, Illich remarks gnomically that, "Present-day institutions, and

87 Illich, *In Conversation*, 242. His emphasis.

88 Illich, *In Conversation*, 242-243.

even the Church, are trying to *produce grace*, whereas they should be tables around which we can find each other, in a mysterious way".[89] The meaning of this becomes clearer in light of our reflections above, for if divine grace is abroad within the world, but always mediated in unexpected, mysterious, and irreducibly specific ways, then at the same time it cannot be grasped *as such*, in direct or exhaustive fashion. As that which must be received as a surprising gift, grace cannot be made subject to merely finite modes of power, it cannot be 'produced' through a predictable process of which the end result is a causal necessity. This is the difference between grace as Illich understands it, as manifest within nature, but always mysteriously so, and grace as an extrinsic addition, wherein it can appear as a "purely nominal change in status by the decree of an arbitrary God mediated by the power structure of a church... the mask for mere worldly ecclesiastical dominion".[90] It is this claim to worldly 'dominion' – a claim essentially to a monopoly over the operations of the divine within the world – that Illich rejects.

Illich's overarching narrative of the institutionalisation of charity has everything to do with the hubristic belief that grace and charity can be exhaustively *administered*, as opposed to the traditional idea, consequent upon an intrinsic conception of nature and grace, that "*wherever* love and mercy are shown, there divine charity is present".[91] The latter rather than the former makes necessary the waiting upon the other, the 'universal' attentiveness to specifics and particulars, that are such primary themes in Illich's various writings. For Illich, as an institution intent on 'producing' grace, the Roman Church has been guilty of the same propensity to fetish-

89 Illich, "*Un Certain Regard*", unpaged. My emphasis.

90 Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 22.

91 Milbank, *Suspended Middle*, 22. His emphasis.

ise organisation and formal process as its 'secular' progeny, resulting in a perversion of faith, its fall into something juridical and depersonalised.[92] Illich's theological indirectness – an outcome of his personal conflicts with the Roman hierarchy, and explicitly associated by him with his renunciation of ecclesiastical power – is part of his response to this complex problem. The elliptical form discloses the substantive theological point that divine grace and charity, though abroad within the world, are never approached directly or grasped *in toto*. One cannot 'produce' these gifts, and if they are to be encountered, then this will be by indirect means, as mediated mysteriously through innumerable particulars, and received by way of surprise. In refusing to bring forth the theological directly, his work paradoxically lies open to its unforced and gratuitous appearing: saving itself by appearing to lose itself. It therefore contributes to that openness to finding the divine in unexpected places that for Illich is the essence of faith, but which is stifled by the mistaken notion that a regulated process can substitute for this "spiritual substance".[93]

Conclusion: Levity and the Art of Living

This essay has sought to bring a different order of attention to bear on Illich's work by attending to its form and style, and thereby to say something distinctive about the place of theology in the thought of a man as deeply traditioned as Illich was. The Pauline phrase that is repeated throughout Hugh of St Victor's untranslated letter at the front of *ABC*, is *Charitas nunquam excidit*, or 'Charity never ends'. In the tradition from which Illich draws, here, grace and charity are a divine plenitude. This means they are not a scarce resource to be mastered and manipulated by human hands. To assert any

92 Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 59-63, 80-94.

93 Ivan Illich, "The Cultivation of Conspiracy", in Hoinacki and Mitcham (eds), *The Challenges of Ivan Illich*, 241.

kind of monopoly over or totalising knowledge of the workings of grace and charity is therefore to risk a kind of idolatry, to deify humanity.[94]

For Illich, this has an ecclesiastical manifestation, but also a 'secularised' one; to repeat his remark to Domenach, "Present-day institutions, and even the Church, are trying to *produce grace*, whereas they should be tables around which we can find each other, in a mysterious way". In such a context, Illich calls us to relinquish our pretensions to control and mastery, in order to cultivate a disciplined openness to the surprising and the unexpected within this graced world. This issues in a different mode of attention: somewhat ludic or playful insofar as it demands that one's settled sense of things be held continually in question, as it is only then that one can be receptive to the enigmatic presence of divine otherness within ordinary reality as surprise and mystery. "We should be looking to the message of the gospel", he says, "for inspiration, for courage, a sense of humour, a sense of the relativity of things… the fear of God".[95] Elsewhere, he indicates that what the gospel contributes is like the laughter in the joke.[96] The practiced openness to otherness for which Illich calls therefore carries with it a sense of lightness and play, rather than the heaviness of an austere kind of piety. Any code, including any ecclesiastical code, that asserts simply how the world

94 Illich refers to the risk of "depersonalization by idolatry" in *Powerless Church*, 136.

95 Illich, "*Un Certain Regard*", unpaged. He says shortly afterwards that the 'fear of God', here, is the "friendly fear… [of] not wanting anything to come between us".

96 Illich, *Powerless Church*, 136. The relevance of humour for critical perception is evident fairly widely in Illich; early on, he argues that "real revolutionaries are men who look with a deep sense of humour, with sarcasm, upon their institutions" (in Plessix Gray, *Divine Disobedience*, 274), and writes in *Tools for Conviviality* that, "Poets and clowns have always risen up against the oppression of creative thought by dogma. They expose literal-mindedness with metaphor. They demonstrate the follies of seriousness in a framework of humour" (*Tools for Conviviality*, 75). See also his reference to the virtue of *eutrapelia*, drawing on the Jesuit theologian Hugo Rahner's work on play, in *Tools for Conviviality* (13).

predictably is, must be rigorously avoided, as then there are no more surprises. Ultimately, this is about a way of being in the present, then, and celebrating it with others: an art of living. As Agamben comments, "for Illich, the experience of the event of the Kingdom…fully coincides with the present moment, in which the one who understands the message bears witness to it by laughing".[97] Illich's indirect way of dealing with the theological is intertwined with this outlook, forming part of his 'iconoclastic' response to a "world immune to grace", as he describes the closed circuits of late-modern existence at one point.[98] It contributes to an openness to the divine beyond juridical formulas—grace and charity as mysteriously *an-archic*, unconstrained by all-too-human laws.

Other stylistic characteristics of his work that I have not had room to explore in as much detail here are similarly significant. Its unfinished, elliptical, fragmentary, *ad hoc* character—aspects that often make its interpretation difficult— are all ways in which his work remains *open*, rather than at risk of becoming its own kind of closed circuit, its own absolutizing or totalising system, or something that might substitute for that practiced readiness for surprise that he hoped to encourage. In large part, Illich's thought is centrally concerned with processes of social mediation, in the sense of the relation of the interpersonal to the organised and to formal structures of power; by mediating differently, his work contributes to the undoing of over-organisation in modernity for the sake of the interpersonal, for the sake of friendship and charity.

97 Agamben, "Laughter and the Kingdom", xii. Cf. Cayley, *Ivan Illich*, 406-407.

98 Cited by Cayley in Illich, *Rivers North of the Future*, 225.

Gratuitous relation: Illich and the play of religion, money, and gift

by Oscar Krüger

I: Introduction

Gifts on the one hand, money on the other. Each is a manner of making claims on our actions, and by which we claim the acts of others. This essay offers a provisional reflection, in three parts, on prominent critiques levelled from the standpoint of one towards the other – and the distance which Illich's position occupies in relation to both.

I: Money

Once upon a time, Erysichthon, king of Thessaly, found himself desiring a new banqueting hall. Such a hall needs walls, a roof, a doorway… for all of which one needs the appropriate materials. Not wanting for wood, the king directed his workers to a grove of trees to supply the lumber. But as the men proceeded with their task, they came upon a sacred tree protected by Demeter. They refused to proceed. Out of frustration, Erysichthon grabbed the axe for himself and—ignoring pleas arising from the very depths of the woods, from the divinities, from the dryad which dwelled in the tree—felled it. Demeter, filled with fury at this sacrilege, cursed the king with an insatiable hunger, which food only served to fuel. Driven to eat endlessly, the king sold all his possessions and, in the end, even his own daughter, until he was finally compelled to devour himself.

In a 2009 address delivered in Glasgow, the classicist Richard Searford turns to this ancient myth as if it were a mythological account of what was, at the time, a new technol-

Oscar Krüger, oscar.kruger@keg.lu.se
Krüger, O. Gratuitous relation: Illich and the play of religion, money, and gift. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 161-172

ogy; a reflection developed by a people not yet accustomed to its effects. That new technology was money. Or, more specifically, coinage, as a material token (solid, enduring, moveable) whose value resides in the fiduciary function of the stamp imprinted on its surface. And with this technology, in the very city which was at the time becoming the world's first monetized society, arose the way of life known as philosophy.[1] Just like coinage "[implies] a homogeneous ideal substance distinct from the metal in which the sign is expressed",[2] so also these philosophers for the very first time began to imagine the cosmos as an order of impersonal power, intelligible as "a single substance underlying the plurality of things manifest to the senses".[3] As philosophy moved across the Aegean Sea to take residence in Athens, these origins are perhaps most strongly discerned in the philosophical method of inquiry rather than in its postulates. As Deleuze shows, the Platonic dialogues follow a distinct pattern.[4] First, a myth is deployed to indicate what something really is. Then, a series of successive claimants to the title of being an authentic copy of that something is examined, in an endeavour to sort good copies from counterfeit ones. Very much, that is, as one would already have to sort authentic coins from counterfeit ones.

Whatever the origin of philosophy may owe to the origin of coinage—neither Seaford nor I propose any monocausal "explanation"—their subsequent relation has been fraught with tension. As D.C. Schindler points out, the very first defence which Socrates invokes at that trial which precedes his

1 David Graeber points out that coinage emerged simultaneously also in northern China and by the Ganges. In each case we find similar transformations in thinking: D. Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, Melville House, New York, 2012, p. 212.

2 R. Seaford, *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 137.

3 Ivi, p. 175.

4 G. Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum", *October* 27, pp. 45–56.

death, asserts something which scarcely relates to the charges actually laid against him: that he has never charged money for teaching. The effect of the claim, however, was to distinguish Socrates from the class of teachers known as sophists, and to so distinguish the philosophy of Socrates from the techniques of persuasion taught by the latter—and taught for a fee. Thus, an orientation to the Good on the one hand, and an orientation to money on the other. This contrast becomes poignant precisely due to their apparent similarity, where both appear as boundless universal substances beyond appearances. The value of money is nonetheless a counterfeit double, insofar as it is distinct *from* its material instantiations rather than manifest *through* them. [5]

Much as among the storytellers who first told us of Erysichthons' misadventures, this thinking recognizes the immense powers that the small symbol of money exercise upon the hearts of men. Likewise, it recognizes the ruin money can bring, as it sets men on an endless pursuit of an empty symbol, divorced from any measure of what is *really* true, good, beautiful, as the sacred tree of Demeter must surely have been, standing in its sacred grove. Into Aristotle this hostility survives. *Chrematistics,* this philosopher called money-making for the sake of money-making, and warned particularly against

> […] usury, which makes a gain out of money itself, and not from the natural object of it. For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term interest, which means the birth of money from money, is applied to the breeding of money because the offspring resembles the parent. Wherefore of all modes of

5 D. C. Schindler, "Why Socrates didn't charge: Plato and the metaphysics of money", *Communio* 36, 2009.

> getting wealth, this is the most unnatural.[6]

In Aristotle, this critique of money is animated by a valorisation of community, of the city. The foundation for the city, in turn, was friendship; "friendship holds cities together" (Book VIII), he asserts, turning the friend also into the reason for having a city in the first place. "Surely", he held, "it is strange, too, to make the supremely happy man a solitary; for no one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone".
Similarly for Aquinas, this most influential Aristotelian of the Middle Ages:

> If the citizens themselves devote their life to matters of trade, the way will be opened to many vices. Since the foremost tendency of tradesmen is to make money, greed is awakened in the hearts of the citizen through the pursuit of trade. The result is that everything in the city will become venal; good faith will be destroyed and the way opened to all kinds of trickery; each one will work only for his own profit, despising the public good; the cultivation of virtue will fail since honour, virtue's reward, will be bestowed upon the rich. Thus in such a city, civil life will necessarily be corrupted.[7]

In Aquinas, furthermore, this is a stand buttressed by a tradition we now speak of as religious. "You cannot serve both God and money", holds one of the most renowned passages of this religious tradition. Furthermore, as Illich posits, the story where Jesus instructs Peter to recover a coin from the mouth of a fish (for the purposes of paying tax) is a gesture which "is that of a clown; it shows that this mira-

6 Aristotle, Politics, Book I, Part X

7 Aquinas, cited in M. Howell, *Commerce before Capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 263-264.

cle is not meant to prove him omnipotent but indifferent to matters of money".[8] At this point, philosophy and religion are linked in their repudiation of money. But what then about the other side of the coin?

II: Gifts

For many, the alternative to money and commodity is manifest in that "ordinary but decent wine"[9] a new acquaintance might hand you as he steps across your doorstep. As a performance which, in some contexts, conforms to almost ritual expectations, this act nonetheless ensnares you in the webs of the gift. Ostensibly free, the real substance of gift – as originally demonstrated by the great anthropologist Marcel Mauss in his 1925 essay *The Gift* – is the threefold obligation by which it binds: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, the obligation to return. In a fashion which is highly symptomatic of the shortcomings of analytical models in vogue today, this relatively straightforward proposition has proved immensely resistant to assimilation into the modern social and economic sciences.

This is because it is crucial, if we are to come to terms with the gift, to conceive of the manner by which it involves not individual actors defined separately from the transactive strategies they pursue; what Mauss demonstrated, fundamentally, was "the possibility of interpenetration as a durable condition", where, "the gift I give to you, and that is incorporated into your very being, remains fully conjoined to me. Through the gift, my awareness penetrates yours–I am with you in your thoughts–and in your counter-gift, you are with

8 I. Illich, "The Educational Enterprise in the Light of the Gospel", *Unpublished Manuscript,* 1988. David Tinapples collection, https://www.davidtinapple.com/illich/1988_Educational.html

9 I. Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich*, edited by David Cayley, House of Anansi Press, Toronto, 2005, p. 146.

me in mine. And so long as we continue to give and receive, this interpenetration can carry on or perdure. Our lives are bound or drawn together as literally as two hands clasping".[10]

This perduration only works because gifts are *not* "free", and because this clasp–this obligation – thus holds together the perpetual motion which generates the human world. This is the inverse of the commodity, as that thing where obligations (and hence relations) terminate at the point where money is transferred back to the original giver. And this is precisely why so many of those who are now concerned with the disorder propelled by money turn from money to gift, as from commodity to community. On the one hand, this turn aligns with the ancient critique of money, which–as is very clear in Aristotle–was nourished by a rallying around community. But if this critique is so ancient, how come that money was nonetheless triumphant? Because of structural and material processes surely. But not only, as Albert O. Hirschman shows.[11] Commerce ascended its place due the ideological work of some who, as a mirror image of those who now propose that gifts can solve the crisis brought about by money, once believed that money can solve the problem that is community and gift.

The context for this was the early modern Wars of Religion. As communities of faith were pitted against each other, and the lands of Europe were engulfed by carnage, some intellectuals suddenly found in money–and in the very same features for which money had been rebuked–the key to a brighter, better future. Community ties, feudal fealty, honour and pride; these lead to the devastation these men faced all around them. *Money,* however, appeals not only to some group then inevitably pitted against another, but to *everybody.* And if ev-

10 T. Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, Routledge, Oxon, 2015, pp. 10-11.

11 A. O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977.

erybody can be made to look to their economic self-interest first, their propensity to pursue non-economic distractions (like glory, or conquest) would abate, and human conduct become predictable for as long as money still exercises its appeal–which, as the ancients well knew, means forever.

Nowhere is the ethical and political preference for commodities over gift as articulate as in the works of that one person to whom economists to this day owe their fundamental categories: Adam Smith. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner", goes the widely renowned declaration made by Smith in the *Wealth of Nations*, "but from their regard to their own interest".[12] Less famous, however, is the direct continuation: "Nobody but a beggar chooses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens".

Smith's statement was never a naturalisation of greed, but a critique of the gift. This critique, in turn, stemmed from an acute awareness of how gifts so easily entrench inequalities between donor and recipient, and underpin the bonds of obedience which bind servant to master, subordinate to their–perhaps "benevolent" – superior.[13] As parties to a commercial contract, instead, the beggar might find himself not a subordinate of the butcher or baker, but their equal. Perhaps even their friend, once business hours are over, and they find themselves gathered in the halls of the brewer.[14]

"Gift" and "community". Also etymologically, these belong together, through the *munus* in *co-munus*.[15] Yet *munus*

12 A. Smith, *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981[1776], p. 18.

13 As Illich was very well aware. See S. Ravenscroft, "Modernity and the Economics of Gift and Charity: On Ivan Illich's Critique of Abstract Philanthropy", *Telos* 174, 2016, pp. 149–70.

14 L. Bruni, op. cit.

15 R. Esposito, *Communitas: Origine e Destino Della Comunità. Nuova Edizione Ampliata*, Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, Turin, 1998.

also means duty, and arguably

> The ambivalence of the *munus*–gift and obligation–can and should be read in terms of its intra- and inter-community dimensions. The inter-community circle of gift shows the twofold nature of the *munus*; but in the context of intra-community relations only the obligation component of gift exists, generally in a servant-to-master hierarchical dynamics. The members of the community (wives, children, slaves, servants...) are "expropriated" because there is nothing they can call their own, except for the obligation they have towards the community. [16]

When addressing that ancient world, where the division of secular and the religious domains of power were yet to be invented, some deploy the word *religion* to speak of these bonds: *re-ligio,* binding together, of both divinities and mortals.[17] What money once seemed to offer was freedom from such religion, meaning freedom from the bonds and duties and passions which suture and separate superior from inferior, friend from enemy. And in that light, the hopes attached to money is perhaps not altogether different from the promise gift seems to hold today.

What to make of all this?

16 L. Bruni, *The Genesis and Ethos of the Market*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London, 2012, p. 11.

17 e.g. Ivi, p. 6. See however Agamben for the possibility of reading religion towards *religare* rather than *religere,* i.e. to re-read: *Profanations*. Zone Books, New York, 2007. This opens the term to different yet entirely pertinent possibilities of Illichian reflection: I. Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon*, Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993.

III: Illich

The friend–that *philos* which appears in the very name of the philosophers' enterprise[18]–was the cornerstone on which Illich developed one of the 20th century's most profound critiques of money and markets. But while going back to Plato and Cicero to build his understanding of friendship, he would nonetheless insist that "friendship can never mean the same thing for me as it does to Plato".[19] And while he remained a man of the cloth throughout his adult life, he would also insist: "I don't want to be a religious man. I am the descendant of the martyrs who, according to Roman law which was very solid and precise, were thrown to the beasts as truly irreligious [*veri irreligiosi*]; they were people who somehow understood that Jesus freed us from what was then, as today, called religion".[20]

What the preceding sections have outlined is neither money-making nor gift-giving, but the kinds of critique which is levelled from the standpoint of one in direction of the other. The critique of commodities Illich developed from the 1970s onwards, would appear to align him squarely with the latter camp. Few concepts appear as frequently in his writing and speeches as do the word "gift", including the one from whence this journal takes its name: *Das Geschenk* – the gift – *der Conspiratio*. "I cannot come to be fully human", he would say, "unless I have received myself as a gift and accepted myself as a gift of somebody who has, well today we say distorted me the way you distorted me by loving me." His valorisation of traditional communities, furthermore, appears classically Aristotelian where he defends *vir-*

18 G. Agamben, *L'amico*. Nottetempo, Rome, 2007.

19 I. Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future,* op cit., p. 147.

20 I. Illich, "The Personal Decision in a World Dominated by Communication", *Conspiratio* 4, 2023, pp. 98–110.

tue as "that shape, order and direction of action informed by tradition, bounded by place, and qualified by choices made within the habitual reach of the actor; we mean practice mutually recognized as being good within a shared local culture that enhances the memories of a place".[21]

Nonetheless, the friend of Illich was not the philosopher's friend, as he appeared in the shape of Aristoteles' highly guarded circle of equals, gathered on the basis of self-similarity.[22] For reasons which will be familiar to all who have studied his teaching, the friend of Illich was a stranger from beyond the city walls, encountered not as an alter-ego but in "the total otherness of someone", for whom he "renounce[d] searching for bridges between the other and me, recognizing that a gulf separates us".[23] His community, likewise, was not the ancient community of re-ligion, or collective rituals or sacred hierarchies; it was something found in "niches, free spaces, squatters arrangements, spiritual tents which some of us might be capable to offer, not for "the dropout in general" but each of us for a small "list" of others who, through the experience of mutual obedience have become able to renounce integration in the "system."

The intention for the present essay is simply this: to provide some context for reflecting on Illich's critique of economics and commodities as not only a reappropriation of ancient logics of gift and community. In fact, many of the liberatory (and precocious) transformations he reads towards the Parable of the Good Samaritan could be read in a materialist fashion, towards money and markets as liberators from communities and bonds of duty. Yet just as Illich's historical

21 I. Illich et al., *Declaration on Soil.* A joint statement, drafted in Hebenshausen, Germany, December 6, 1990, https://www.davidtinapple.com/illich/1990_declaraion_soil.PDF.

22 T. Everett, "The Conspiratio of Ivan Illich and the Kiss of Peace", *Conspiratio,* Fall, 2023, pp. 216–58.

23 I. Illich, "The Educational Enterprise in the Light of the Gospel", op cit.

narratives differ from such materialist approaches, so the distance he takes from the sacred communities of old differs from that taken by the ideologues of money. He *does* pursue a reappropriation of the logic of gift–yet he appears to do so in a manner which has radically transformed that which it reappropriates. And this transformation takes place around the category of "obedience".

Gifts create bonds of obedience, and Samar Farage–a friend of Illich–recalls how he would address friends: "Tell me what to do and I will obey you".[24] This is not obedience to inherited duty or position. So what obedience is it, then? At one point, Illich speaks of his faith, and of how the salvation it offers "is not offered through the power of his doctrine, but through trust in his person". "Modern English has lost the word for this kind of trust", he continues", but "[t] he biblical word for it is obedience. Obedience in the biblical sense means unobstructed listening, unconditional readiness to hear, untrammeled disposition to be surprised".

A long tradition of thinking identifies the trajectory of Western philosophy as an arc, directed by the endeavour to render being stable, predictable, secure. The core Christian experience of the world, by contrast, was one of contingency; of a cosmos bereft of natural necessity.[25] The world is as it is, but none of it was ever *necessary,* and any moment it can be made anew. *Grace* is the word Illich used to contrast this contingent world to the world of the modern philosophers which is "immune to grace". But, again, this grace was a matter of faith – of "trust in his person" – not religious doctrine. What Illich spoke of when speaking of grace was *gratuity,* or existing "just so, for the fun of it, for your sake …" which "in its

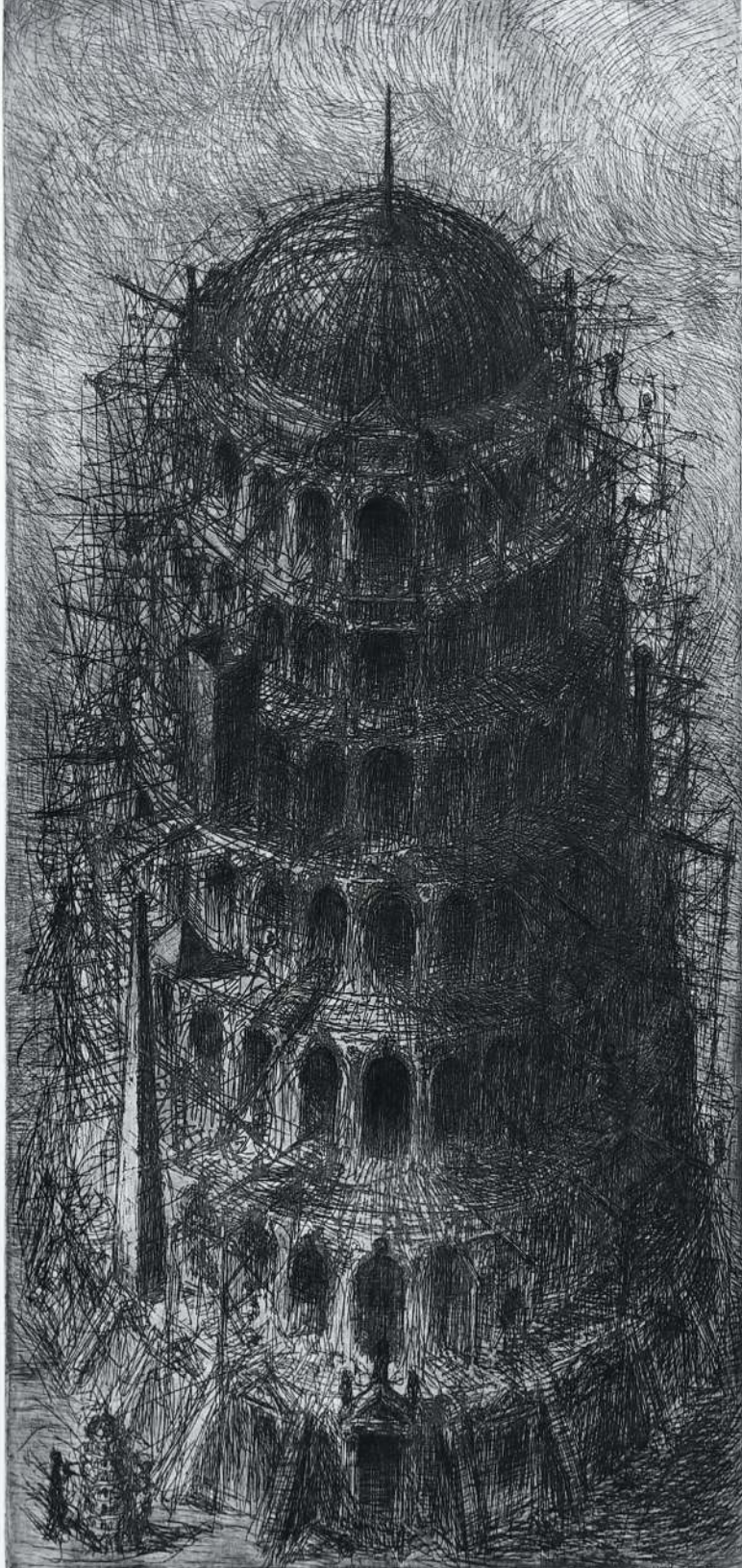
24 S. Farage, "Remembering Illich's Convivium", *Conspiratio* 1, 2021, pp. 136–45.

25 G. Agamben, *Karman: Breve Trattato Sull'azione, La Colpa e Il Gesto*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 2017.

most beautiful flowering, is praise, mutual enjoyment".[26]

Illich's biographers show us a person who sought to live this sense of contingent gratuity to the fullest. They also show us a man who handled money, gave and received gifts, issued and obeyed direct commands. Each is a way by which claims are made on us. Illich appears to listen and to hearken to these claims. Yet re-planted in the soil of a gratuitous experience of the world, the obedience each demands is transformed, now (paradoxically) into a freedom of obedience rather than submission. It would be presumptuous to derive a programme for monetary reform or for constructing a new kind of gift-economy from these reflections, yet perhaps one might uncover a way of better facing the times which are ours to face.

26 I. Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future,* op cit., pp. 227-229.



Artifact and memory

(...) all things aim at contemplation and look to it as their one goal; not only rational but also non-rational animals and the nature in plants and the earth which produces them (...)
Plotinus, Ennead III. 8[30]

Imagining the landscapes underlying cities, as a critique of space, allows us to reflect on the fate of an encounter between Nature and Artifice and, in this context, to recognize respect for the forces of place in architectural thought.

The design of time on constructions seem to reveal both the significance of the artifacts and the appropriateness of their location. It remains to be believed that one truth persists, or at least that this condition reveals the quality of an agreement between artificer and Nature.

Although fantastical, the recognition of resistance outlines the radical condition of ruins. Sometimes the attitude identifies the testimony in a definite way, at other times it allows speculation about the ephemerality of actions and, even beyond that, a projection. Whether as complete finitude to which all matter is destined, or as a driving force for new undertakings: *Rome, even in ruins, teaches us.*

In the context of memory articulating itself to generate meaning, ruins allow for the creation of multiple images. What remains allows for the emergence of a myriad of possibilities, fruits of poetic ingenuity. The corrosion of the stonework and its overtaking by vegetation alludes to an irreversible condition of existence, but also allows for unintentional invention, such as the Corinthian order, conceived from the suggestion of an abandoned column taken over by an acanthus bush.

The ruins promise more to the poetic realm than the building in its entirety, for they allow the imagination a possibility of becoming that corroborates time as a sculptor. Furthermore, as an allegory of transience, they endorse the affirmation of the Earth's survival despite the scars inflicted on it.

George Rembrandt Gutlich, 2025

Between the Vernacular and Surprise

by Tobais Roberts

When my third child was born, I spent two days sitting in a hospital lobby with nothing more than my thoughts, my trepidations, and a paperback novel found in the reading corner of that hospital lobby. Charles Frazier's novel "13 Moons" was an appropriate read for that moment of profound waiting. Towards the end of the novel, as my baby girl was moving into the light of this world, the main character of the novel says this:

> In the old days within Granny Squirrel's recollection, before the arrival of the Spaniards and their metal hats, living long was different. Little changed during your span of time, birth to death. Individual people, of course, came and went, but that's the unfortunate transitory nature of people. The physical world surrounding you, though, remained about the same from start to finish. Short of utter apocalypse, the landscape was what it was throughout one's brief life… All that you had learned in childhood remained largely in effect lifelong. When you got old and approached death, it was not an unrecognizable world you left, for we had not yet learned how to break it apart. Back then, about all that changed during your time on earth was that a few big trees had fallen and many new trees had grown in their places. Trunk diameter, really, was all that was in question. Whether you measured the span with your thumb and forefinger or your outstretched arms…All I can say is that we are mistaken to gouge such a deep rift in history that the things old men

Tobais Roberts, tobiasroberts20@hotmail.com
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> and old women know have become so useless as to be not worth passing on to grandchildren.

If we live in an age that has discovered how to break the world apart, the constant movement of people is both a criterion for that capacity, and a result of its unforeseen aftereffects. The learned wisdom of placed-ness through generations could only be shattered by a people who thought there was somewhere else beckoning them. And when the stability of places where change is measured by "trunk diameter" is upended, then mobility becomes a necessary survival mechanism.

Ivan Illich was a wanderer and a pilgrim throughout his life. Having had his home taken from him at such a young age, he was moved into a life of exile, movement, and constant peregrination through the world. Today, for most, that life of constant, itinerant movement is the norm rather than the exception.

Unlike Illich, I never had a true place of belonging that was taken from me by the violence of a world breaking apart. Rather, I was born into the placeless world that inevitably ensues from our constant "taking apart." Perhaps it was because of this migratory, nomadic, and deracinated nature of my generation that I yearned for a place of belonging and rootedness; for a world measured by the slow thickening of old growth trees. Wendell Berry´s novels, together with the opportunity to participate, in some sense, in the rooted, territorial life and traditions of the Mayan Ixil people of northern Guatemala, eventually led my wife and I onto a small plot of land in the northern mountains of El Salvador where one of our first tasks was to plant the trees whose widening girth might be the measure of change in this place we seek to inhabit.

Here on our small mountain farm, we also receive a fair number of drifters—mostly younger people born into that uprooted world and into that generation where the idea

of home was never a settled place of generational tenancy. They come for a day or a week, do the obligatory hikes that are recommended on TripAdvisor or some other digital platform that reduces our little mountain community to a few recommended "musts," take some pictures, and then move on to the next place on the list.

Far from the rootless drifting of so many digital nomads, backpackers, and social media influencers that make their way to our farm today, the wandering nature of Illich's life was evidently deeper than the mobile crowds of today. His movement was never through places, but *into* them.

It was this unique character of his wandering that appears to have allowed him to develop a profound deference and regard for the vernacular: that which is "homebred, homespun, homegrown, homemade." It's interesting: a person without a lasting home of his own, but who nonetheless was intent on trying to "*bring into awareness and discussion the existence of a vernacular mode of being, doing, and making that in a desirable future society might again expand in all aspects of life*."[1] He was a self-described "errant pilgrim" who nonetheless was able to find immense value in the subsistence of those whose lives were completely rooted to the boundaries and possibilities of a specific territory.

Despite his affection for Puerto Rico, his community in Ocotpec, and his later life in Bremen, his life was never delineated by a territory where the vernacular and the "homeworld ethos"[2] of a specific place became normative to the shared life of that space. Precisely because of this, I think, he was able to cultivate a theology of the surprise; of being ever aware and open to the possibilities of the Incarnation; of hav-

1 Ivan Illich, "The War against Subsistence" in *Shadow Work*, 57-58.

2 Edmund Husserl described the homeworld ethos as the familiar, taken-for-granted, and comfortable sphere of everyday experience that serves as the foundation for all knowledge and understanding.

ing the itinerant eyes needed to see Christ in whoever's path his pilgrimage crossed.

Unlike the so many errant pilgrims of modern times, Illich sought his way into the depths of the uniqueness of the places that the freedom of surprise led him. And thus, he was able to discern the exceptionality of the vernacular; of the abundance capable of emerging from lives of subsistence; and of placed and rooted lives that continued to stubbornly resist the siren call to join in the breaking apart of the world and to mobilize one's self in the pursuit of the spoils of that breaking apart.

I think that this ability to live in between the vernacular and the surprise is what made Illich uniquely inspirational to so many people. His profound openness to the freedom that occurs when embracing the susceptibility of surprise was also rooted to the goodness found in lives of subsistence and placed-ness. His candidness in seeking the profound freedom to live and love beyond the boundaries of tradition specifically sought out those places where rooted cultures flowered from the solidity of tradition that provides time-tested strategies for thriving within the limits of a shared geography; of learning to live within a territory and discover the abundance within restraint.

One of Illich's greatest gifts was his ability to walk the tightrope between the vernacular and the surprise, and though I don't believe he ever mentioned this specifically, one unheralded character of the Good Samaritan story that he so appreciated provides us an example of how to do this faithfully.

The Samaritan Remedying with Surprise

Much has been written and said about Illich's great affinity for the parable of the Good Samaritan. He saw this parable as encompassing the true novelty, freedom, and goodness that the Incarnation offered. And as he points out time and time again, the question posed to Jesus is not "how should I act

towards a certain situation," but rather: "who is my neighbor."

In the parable, the Samaritan *came where the man was,* whereas the priest and the Levite *passed by on the other side*. This "passing by" is an evident "malfunction" of the "ethos of an ethnos," because one of the defining elements of living in place is the dimension of shared space; of there not being "another side" where one can hide from the shared lives that transpire within the shared boundaries of a shared territory. This proximity of proverbial small-town life is often ridiculed as parochial; the claustrophobic nearness where "everyone knows everyone" and where the required, private space of the individual (perhaps another modern certainty) is relentlessly trampled on.

Notwithstanding the parochial and sometimes restrictive boundaries of place-based cultures, a sense of territorial rootedness that was functional would simply not allow for one to pass by on the other side. The Samaritan moves into that unoccupied space to fill this void of a malfunctioning territorial ethos by reconstructing the sense of shared space when he chooses to "come to where the man was." The compassionate response and the being moved in one's bowels is thus dependent upon occupying that shared space. The common belonging of Jewish neighbors had been unheeded by the priest and the Levite. In the case of the Samaritan, the shared space is not ethnic or national in nature. Rather, it is the shared space of travelers on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho; the common nature of fellow travelers through this life. It is a common belonging that arises from the novelty of the Incarnation and of the freedom to react in love beyond the boundaries of our comfortable sphere of vernacular life.

Of course, that space was not the Samaritan's to fill, following from the traditional norms of the territorial ethos. As Illich says, his action of coming to the beaten man was

"utterly destructive of ethical decency"[3] because that space wasn't open to him, and shouldn't have been open to him had the territorial ethos functioned properly. However, as Illich so often said, the Incarnation allows for surprise to creep into the dusty corners of the territorial ethos we are born into and which often grows stale through repetition and routine. It allows for the freedom to choose not only "who will be my neighbor" and "who I will act as a neighbor towards," but it also allows for the radical freedom to step into those spaces and territories that are not mine by inheritance.

Like the Samaritan, I think Illich's life is an example of the brilliant receptivity towards Incarnational surprise. However, Illich was also deeply aware of the possibility for corruption in a life of surprise untethered to rooted responsibilities and the propriety of right living as defined by shared space. Perhaps we could say he grounded the possibility for surprise in his esteem for the vernacular. The freedom of Incarnational surprise was oriented towards re-rooting that love and friendship in real places of rooted tradition. Without those roots, the mysterious evil of the corruption of the best is always lurking around the corner.

The Innkeeper

The unsung character in Illich's favorite parable is perhaps the most essential, though one who is almost always overlooked as a simple placeholder in the story. The innkeeper, we are told, takes in a bloodied, bandaged, and half-dead neighbor and is entrusted to "take care of him." Though he is offered financial compensation for this task, there is no argument or refutation of this responsibility from the innkeeper. He didn't fret about blood on his bedding, worry about potentially driving away other customers with this horrid looking

3 *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich as told to David Cayley*, House of Anansi, 2004, p. 51

fellow, nor tell the Samaritan that it would be more reasonable to find a doctor, or to call the authorities.

Unlike the priest and the Levite, the territorial ethos is still functional in the innkeeper. By the virtues of neighborliness, he knows that he shares in the life of this fellow Jew and has a duty of responsibility for his wellbeing. Maybe we can even imagine that Jesus was trying to redeem the innkeeper vocation from those older innkeepers who had denied a space to his pregnant mother.

The Samaritan, as a traveler and a guest in the territorial ethos that he willingly entered upon by drawing close to the wounded Jew, was unique in that he allowed the dimension of surprise to redefine for him who his neighbor was to be in the incarnational moment of this otherwise ordinary walk down to Jericho. However, in approaching the innkeeper, the Samaritan also recognizes the limitations in his ability to embody true neighborliness. The openness to surprise in the moment which "extends the Incarnation" in the parable of the Samaritan ultimately looks to the stability of a vernacular ethos to embody that surprising openness to love.

As a fellow traveler on the road, the Samaritan didn't have a home where he could invite the wounded man. He didn't have a bed that he could offer him. He didn't have at hand a kitchen where a meal could be prepared to nurse the wounded stranger back to health, nor an extra pair of clothing to offer the poor, bloodied guy.

Perhaps the two denarii he offered were the last coins in his pocket. As revolutionary, heroic, and necessary as his initial response to the incarnational moment was; as important a lesson in Incarnational freedom his reaction to the wounded man embodies, would the Samaritan's response have been as world-shattering had there not been an innkeeper in the story who maintained some semblance of devotion to the territorial ethos of a shared place? Would we remem-

ber the Samaritan's act if, after that initial bandaging of the wounds, the poor, battered Jew eventually died after the Samaritan continued on his way to Jericho? Might the innkeeper's silent acceptance of the quotidian neighborly response be that which gives light and meaning to the Samaritan's act of purely free and unbounded compassion?

I don't mean to imply that the innkeeper's role is simply pragmatic or that a vernacular ethos is simply useful in a functional and effective sense. I think it would be reductive to only esteem the innkeeper's contribution to the situation in light of its utilitarian value. David Cayley, quoting Claus Held, says that "actively compassionate love cannot take the place of a historically developed ethos. Agape can only intervene as a corrective, when a pregiven ethos breaks down."

Without an innkeeper whose actions are not defined by revolutionary surprise, but rather by the conventional compliance with the vernacular ethos, the corruption that Illich saw so clearly becomes evident. If the Samaritan had no place to return the wounded man, and if there was no innkeeper available to engage in the routine, unheralded, and mundane tasks of nursing the poor fellow back to health, then eventually the practical responsibilities resulting from the Samaritan's freedom would have to be institutionalized by religion or by state bureaucracy. Someone would have to deal with the long-term duties that were born from the agape moment of surprising love that the Samaritan shows.

Without the innkeeper, the corruption of the best necessarily becomes the worst. The openness to surprise which is essential to living an incarnational life is reliant on the continued stability of the vernacular tradition, the territorial ethos, and the homeworlds that too often atrophy into the disregard and neglect of responsibility exemplified by the priest, the Levite, and indeed the whole of modernity who would much prefer to entrust or outsource responsibility for the wounded

men in our midst to the authorities and institutions. The freedom of surprise compels the tethers of vernacular tradition. The inspiration of the Incarnational moment needs the pragmatism of placed peoples.

A World Deprived of Homeworlds

What to make, then, of a world where the pregiven ethos of a vernacular territory has been systematically erased over generations of taking apart the worlds of old? Should we focus on acts of agape as a corrective, or in the necessary tasks of rebuilding those vernacular spaces where the rooted ethos can reemerge?

Illich believes, I think, that the re-construction of a sense of rooted belonging and a territorial ethos in this world that has been broken apart by our constant mobility will require an element of surprise. At the end of *Gender*, Illich writes: "I strongly suspect that a contemporary art of living *can* be recovered…The hope for such a life rests upon the rejection of sentimentality and on openness to surprise."[4]

The contemporary art of a rediscovered vernacular realm where a rooted ethos can begin to slowly re-emerge requires the openness to surprise. In the modern world governed by novelty, mobility, and constant change, discovering the goodness of a world where change is measured by the annual rings of thickening wood on old growth trees will require an element of surprise. In a sense, the task of rebuilding the inns for innkeepers will be contingent upon our ability to be surprised by the profound goodness that can be created in the vernacular realm.

Cayley, again discussing Held's analysis of the Samaritan parable, notes that the Samaritan's free and open response to the surprise of the Incarnational moment occurs in a "no

4 Ivan Illich, *Gender*, Marion Boyars 1982.

man's land – an area where the referential contexts of the two worlds in effect cancel each other." The failure of the priest and Levite create an opportunity for the Samaritan, who "in establishing a relationship with the man in the ditch begins a new world and thus demonstrates a power that has been super-added to him through the Incarnation, not one that could ever belong to his natural repertoire. He acts, as Illich repeatedly says, on a call."

With the deepest esteem for the pockets of indigeneity in this broken-apart world, I think it is safe to say that most of us are living in a permanent "no man's land" today: a space where any sort of referential context for ethical action has been replaced by the free-for-all of individual hedonism and the acquiescence towards institutional management to deal with the inconvenient beaten and bloodied men in the ditches of modernity.

The transient nature of our broken-apart world, the lack of belonging, the loss of tradition, the compulsion to untethered mobility: all of these characteristics of the modern moment have left us without a vernacular grounding for ethical action that arises from the solidity of tradition, territory, and time.

But maybe there is an opportunity hiding in the brokenness of the vernacular realm. Illich says in, *Towards a History of Needs,* that "only free men can change their minds and be surprised; and while no men are completely free, some are freer than others."

Maybe somewhat ironically, the posturing sovereignty of modernity with all its emphasis on atomized individuals, digital omnipotence, and untethered mobility may have left open fissures where freedom, as the openness to surprise, might emerge. In these fissures, perhaps we can discover a new world that combines the openness to surprise in the Samaritan with the rooted responsibility of the

innkeeper. The grace that invites us to "extend the Incarnation" in free and unobstructed acts of love also summons us to send down roots into a certain soil of this given earth to construct pathways of vernacular tradition that create space for that love to flourish.

The Barefoot Prophet: Ivan Illich's Forgotten Warnings for Our Times

by John Kurien*

An Unexpected Visitor

"*John, can you come over? There is a gentleman here who seems to be an important person and wants to meet you!*"

That was my director's voice, hushed and in Malayalam, crackling through the intercom of my office at the Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, in April 1978.

I entered to find a tall, unshaven man in wrinkled clothes, barefoot, with the air of a wandering monk.

"*Ah, you are John? The fishers at the boatyard on Vizhinjam beach told me about you. I'm Ivan Illich.*"

My heart raced. This was the man whose books had already upended my understanding of education, health, and technology. And here he was, not in a European lecture hall, but in Kerala, asking about fishers, village libraries, and the People's Science Movement.

Months later, I found him again on the banks of the Ganges, speed-learning Hindi from a guru in Varanasi. Between those two encounters, I realized: Illich was not just a philosopher—he was a scout from the future, warning us about the traps of '*progress*' we now call normal.

Who Was Ivan Illich? The Radical Monk of Modernity

Before diving deeper, let me pause to introduce this forgotten giant.

Ivan Illich (1926–2002) was an Austrian Catholic priest-turned-philosopher, greatly influenced by Paulo Freire

* Former Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Trivandrum, India.

John Kurien, kurien.john@gmail.com

Kurien, J. The Barefoot Prophet: Ivan Illich's Forgotten Warnings for Our Times. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 187-191

and Arnold Toynbee, who dismantled the myths of industrial society with the precision of a surgeon. Born in Vienna, he worked in New York and Puerto Rico before his critiques of institutional power made him a heretic to both the Church and the academy. By the 1970s, he was a global nomad, debating Sufis in Iran, and—as I witnessed—learning Hindi in Varanasi and studying Kerala's grassroots library and People's Science Movement.

The four seminal books Illich published in the 1970s—works I had absorbed years before meeting him—read today not as period pieces but as an urgent survival manual for our century.

In *Deschooling Society* (1971), he exposed how institutional schooling substitutes certification for true learning, manufacturing obedient workers rather than curious minds.

His *Tools for Conviviality* (1973) drew a crucial distinction between technologies that amplify human agency and those that create dependency—a warning that resonates from outboard motors to artificial intelligence.

In *Energy and Equity* (1974), he demonstrated mathematically how speed, beyond a certain threshold, inevitably erodes community—whether through highways that displace villages or digital platforms that replace human connection.

And in *Medical Nemesis* (1975), he laid bare medicine's paradox—how hospitals, in their relentless specialization, often generate new forms of sickness even as they treat others. Together, these works form a diagnostic framework for understanding how our most trusted institutions can become instruments of control.

Illich was not against progress—he was against progress that robs people of dignity. Today, as we drown in AI hype, climate chaos, and pandemics of loneliness, his voice is urgent.

The Kattumaram and the Outboard Motor: When Progress Becomes Prison

In the 1970s, Kerala's fishing communities still used *kattumarams*—log rafts with lateen sails that moved with the wind's wisdom. When I first introduced Japanese outboard motors (OBM) to them in 1975, the fishers tried them briefly, then rejected them with laughter. "*The sea speaks to the sail, not to this motor*," one explained, patting his weather-beaten raft.

By the 1990s, everything had changed. The same fishers now depended entirely on Yamaha and Suzuki motors, trapped in a cycle that would have made Illich nod grimly.

"*Earlier, the Japanese only set the price of our catch*," fisherman Pathrose told me. *"Now they decide if we can fish at all."* The motors needed constant repairs, the spare parts cost half a day's earnings, and the fuel prices rose with distant wars. What was sold as liberation had become invisible chains.

Illich saw this coming. In *Tools for Conviviality*, he wrote: "Industrial tools replace competence with demand." The OBM did not just drown the sound of sails—it drowned the right to repair, the right to refuse, the right to rest.

True tools empower communities; industrial tools create dependencies. Today, we see the same pattern everywhere—from farmers locked into seed patents to workers replaced by algorithms.

Learning Without Schools: The Library Movement's Quiet Revolution

Illich was fascinated by Kerala's library movement, where laborers pooled rupees to buy books, they would discuss after work. In *Deschooling Society*, he argued that true learning happens in communities, not classrooms. Education happens when people pursue meaning, not certificates. How different this is from today's coaching factories that

produce exam-takers rather than thinkers. Kerala's *grandhasala* (library) movement worked because it grew from what people truly wanted to know—not what some bureaucrat decided they should learn.

The Medical Paradox: When Healing Creates Harm

On the Varanasi ghats, Illich never spoke of hospitals. He was too busy learning Hindi from a guru who asked no fee but demanded complete presence. This embodied his radical view in *Medical Nemesis*: health cannot be institutionalized without being diminished. Today, India's healthcare swings between AYUSH nostalgia and corporate hospitals. Illich would scorn both: the first romanticizes, the second commodifies.

Modern medicine, he warned, often creates new illnesses even as it treats others. We see this today in the explosion of *"managed"* conditions and pills for ordinary human experiences.Kerala's palliative care movement—where volunteers care for the sick and dying at home—along with neighborhood ASHA workers and midwives, and the fostering of the courage to suffer meaningfully, comes closer to Illich's ideal: that true healing happens in community, not sterile clinics.

The Tyranny of Speed

Illich moved through India at human pace—walking, cycling, sitting long hours in conversation. In *Energy and Equity*, he showed mathematically how speed creates inequality. High-velocity transport does not save time collectively; it redistributes it from the poor to the rich. Kerala's fishermen learned this brutally. Their OBM let them race farther, only to discover they had to go ever farther to find fish, destroying stocks and their own solidarity. Today, as we chase faster digital connections while feeling more disconnected, Illich's warning echoes: *"Beyond a certain speed, no one saves time without forcing others to lose it."*

Conclusion: The Prophet We Should Have Listened To

Half a century after his warnings, we inhabit the world Illich foresaw—one where technology isolates, education standardizes, and medicine commodifies. Yet his legacy offers not despair but direction.

As AI reshapes our cognitive landscapes, as climate disasters accelerate with each passing monsoon, as pandemics emerge from the fractured boundaries between human and natural worlds, Ivan Illich's once-radical questions now demand answers with new desperation. The fundamental question of tools—*who truly controls the off-switch?* —has evolved from outboard motors to ChatGPT, but remains essentially unchanged.

Our health systems have become battlegrounds where we must ask whether we can still reclaim sovereignty over our bodies from pharmaceutical empires. Education, that sacred promise of liberation, now shackles generations to decades of debt while delivering diminishing returns.

And we must confront why visions of '*development*' still insist on eight-lane highways carving through communities and ecosystems alike.

These are not abstract concerns—they echo through Kerala's fishing villages where OBMs replaced sails, through its classrooms where standardized tests replaced curiosity, and through its clinics where healing became transactional. Illich framed these as civilizational choices fifty years ago. Today, they have become existential questions.

The barefoot prophet we ignored may yet show us the way home.

Comments/ responses

L'ambiguïté d'être des fils d'une mère indigne, mais pas de nous

A comment by José Antonio Ullate

Issue 6 of *Conspiratio* included an article by Renée Uribe, entitled *Beyond the 'It': Mutuality, Maternal-Thinking, and the 'She' in Illich's Thought*. I believe that this text is full of errors "regarding things about which I understand so little, but which I enthusiastically believe" (Illich). Like Illich, I too "claim the right not to have to defend" such things.

This note, thus, is not an apology but a testimony: *ut testimonium perhibeam veritati*.

Illich had no reservations about anyone being inspired by his thoughts and doing so according to each one's genius. He was, however, very demanding when a fragment of his writings was torn from its context or even distorted in the service of a different intention.

I will not go into the underlying ideas of Ms. Uribe's text. To support these ideas, the author invokes the authority and authorship of Ivan Illich, but she does so by seriously distorting his thinking. I will limit myself to showing that the author radically distorts what Illich says about the Church on two decisive points. The first is illustrated by the second.

1. The Church 'it' and the Church 'She'

Ms. Uribe's text begins with a showy statement: "Ivan Illich's critique of the church is founded on the distinction between the institutional church ('it') and the mystical body of Christ ('She')." If such a distinction were fundamental to something the author calls "Illich's critique of the church," one would expect a convincing set of references to Illich's work

Jose Antonio Ullate, contraspem@gmail.com
Ullate, J. A. L'ambiguïté d'être des fils d'une mère indigne, mais pas de nous. Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 196-199

or conclusive testimonies to that effect. None of that happens. There is one reference to a much more nuanced quotation from Neto Leao and a vague reference to *The Powerless Church*, where "the distinction, not the way I apply it, between the Church 'it' and the Church 'She' can also be seen."

There is only one source that refers to this distinction in Illich, which is not referenced by Ms. Uribe. It is Francine du Plessix Gray's portrait of Illich in the *New Yorker* in 1970 ("The Rules of the Game", collected in her work *Divine Disobedience*). In the context of a long conversation, du Plessix records this fragment:

> I make a scrupulous distinction," Illich once said, "between the Church as She and the Church as It." ("That one can only say in English," he noted with a smile.) "She is that surprise in the net, the pearl. She is the mystery, the kingdom among us. The identity of the Church as She will remain through whatever changes She's currently undergoing, which are no greater than the changes She underwent under Constantine, or in Abelard's time. Those who believe in Her, believe in something that cannot be said in words. No pronouncements, however stupid, be they on birth control or on clerical celibacy, can lessen my love for Her and my faith in Her mystery. People who leave the Church because of what She says don't understand love. It, however, is the institution, the temporary incarnational form. I can talk about It only in sociological terms. I've never had trouble creating factions and dissent toward the Church as It.

All subsequent references draw from this single source. The occasional example Illich comes up with only serves well in the context of a journalistic conversation with someone interested in Illich's thought. In this context, it serves to point in a direction. It does not attempt to account for the complex

ambivalence of the Church or the internal relations within that Church that is the kingdom and, at the same time, the apparatus of control and power. The error is to decontextualize, to make obvious what has a deictic value and to grant the figure a scope it does not intend. But this error, placed at the beginning as a key —without qualification—to developments openly contradictory to those of Illich, is a 'small error at the beginning of the road' that becomes a 'big error at the finish line'. That is, it leads us to the wrong place.

2. Children of an unworthy mother that *is not one of us?*

The above distortion is better understood when we consider a much more significant deformation. In 1972, the former editor of *Esprit* magazine, Jean-Marie Domenach, spoke with Ivan Illich in Paris. In that conversation, Ivan makes a statement of great ecclesiological and ethical significance:

> Let's accept the ambiguity of being the sons of an unworthy mother, but not of us. And in a certain sense, it also makes you see what our attitude toward the institution should perhaps be.

Ms. Uribe's translation is unfaithful, destroys the bold meaning of what Illich said, and furthermore, turns the phrase into an anacoluthon. According to the author, Illich says: "Let's accept the ambiguity of being sons of a mother who is unworthy, *but not one of us*." What Illich is actually saying is that accepting that we are sons of a mother who, in herself—in her conduct (*quoad se*)—is unworthy, while at the same time not becoming unworthy of us (*quoad nos*), her children, entails an "ambiguity," a paradox. A tension that we must accept.

Ms. Uribe dissolves the paradox, for if the Church is unworthy, but "is not one of us," two unconnected fields are thus established; there is no constitutive tension or confusion pos-

sible between the Church and us [each knows easily in which field is], and for that very reason, it makes no sense to begin by saying "let us accept the ambiguity of..." If Illich had said that he would have absurdly insisted on a nonexistent ambiguity.

In fact, what Illich says is drastically contradictory to what Ms. Uribe attributes to him: the fact that we are conceived by a mother whose behavior is unworthy does not separate us from her, although it imposes on us a dramatic existential condition, that of being permanently in an ambiguous situation (we are both inside and outside at the same time, we feel like children, and this imposes on us an entirely mysterious condition, one that cannot be enclosed within a pre-established code, within a clear demarcation between her and us. An intimate tension, inside of which no ideology or rule can offer us respite). What follows from this initial error (not a small one!) is fatally undermined, like a building founded on sand. Ms. Uribe makes extensive use of our supposed 'alienation' from the Church, which makes it not 'one of us.'

The children of the Church can denounce the Church's falsehood with a virulence far more radical than that available to those who judge her from the outside. But we, as her children, can never contemplate this evil as if we were radically outside, detached, from this ambiguous vortex.

What Illich actually said opens a door to a new, adventurous, and hopeful world, but Ms. Uribe's distortion overwhelms that crack with weeds, returning us to the old paths of ideology.

My testimony cannot be detailed further. It is about taking a friend at his word and speaking out against a falsification of that word: to restore, in some measure, what he actually said. I have not crossed the threshold of the door that Ivan half-opened, but I hope I have contributed to pruning some of the weeds that obstruct it.

Children of the Visible and Unfaithful Mother

Response to José Antonio Ullate by Renee Uribe

I am deeply grateful to José Antonio Ullate for reading my essay, *"Beyond the 'It': Mutuality, Maternal-Thinking, and the 'She' in Illich's Thought."* His note is a gift. As someone newly writing within the Illichian conversation, I regard his engagement as a privilege, an act of friendship that continues the practice Illich most valued: listening, questioning, and pruning one another's understanding in the search for truth.

Mr. Ullate and I seem to approach Illich from different horizons of faith. His reflections draw on the theological grammar in which Illich was first formed, one deeply shaped by the Roman Catholic imagination. My own reading, as I stated in the essay, comes from the Stone-Campbell tradition, one of the many Christian movements branching from the long stream of Catholic faith.[1] I connect with Illich in his teaching and practice of *conspiratio,* inspired by the early Jesus Movement, which shows a path of faith beyond institutional belonging, where mutuality and the lived practice of the Gospel take precedence.

I have learned much from the long and reflective tradition that shaped Illich's thought. As a missiologist and theologian, I have drawn on his insights throughout much of my work. Illich has taught me that faithfulness is not found in purity or detachment, but in remaining within one's own faith community, even if it is in a place of resistance. In many newer denominations, including my own, there is a recurring temptation to start anew whenever conflict arises. I have

1 Renee Uribe, "Beyond the It," Conspiratio, Fall 2024, p. 45.

Renee Uribe, chocolateuribe@gmail.com
Uribe, R. Children of the Visible and Unfaithful Mother.
Conspiratio, 2025/26, p. 200-204

come to see this impulse to leave rather than to remain as a refusal to acknowledge ecclesiastical inheritance, a theological disavowal of the Christian mother-tradition that gave it birth. This is what I identify as "theological motherlessness." For Illich, and increasingly for me, love matures only through fidelity to this visible, adulterous Mother.

Many Protestant communities have not generally spoken of the Church as "Mother," though they affirm her femininity as the Bride of Christ, drawing on Ephesians 5:23–33. I have found Illich's maternal imagery deeply useful precisely because it extends this familiar bridal symbolism into the realm of nurture, embodiment, and endurance. To speak of the Church as Mother, even when unworthy, allows one to acknowledge dependence and formation as well as love. For me, Illich's language of maternity offers a way for those outside the Roman tradition to recover a more embodied sense of belonging, one that keeps the Church visible, vulnerable, alive, and intergenerational.

These last few days, rereading the essay *"How Will We Pass on Christianity?"*, I was struck by Illich's words:

> "It seems as if we sought the visibility of the Church either in new political forms, or as if we wanted to renounce a visible Church in order to be able, like so many Protestants, to imagine that we could belong to a Church of our own choosing in order not to have to admit that we are sons of a visible bitch.(This is a theological statement and I wish I had time to elaborate it. But I strongly recommend the reading of the Urs von Balthazar's *Casta Meretix*, which cost me an awful lot when I got into trouble asking someone to translate it six years ago)"[2]

Illich exposes, in characteristically Roman Catholic language,

2 Ivan Illich, *The Powerless Church and Other Selected Writings, 1955–1985* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2018), 161.

what many of us in the Protestant world have been reluctant to admit. His audacious phrase, echoing von Balthasar's *Casta Meretrix*, expresses the paradox that also animates my work: how to love the Church as *She* while discerning the corruption that turns her into *It*. For me, this recognition is not cynical but liberating: it allows love to remain amid disillusionment, hurt, and potentially in Illich's words, a "nesting place for evil"[3].

1. The *She/It* distinction

In my essay, I treated the *She/It* distinction as an assumption rather than a hypothesis to be proved. For me, it is so deeply woven into Illich's theological imagination that it did not require elaborate demonstration. My intent was not to establish the distinction as a discovery but to work with it as Illich's own interpretive grammar, tracing how it unfolds in his later reflections on friendship, mutuality, and the corruption of service.

Mr. Ullate rightly notes that the explicit pronouns *She* and *It* do not appear in Illich's earliest writings and that, as far as we can document, the first clear instance occurs in Francine du Plessix Gray's 1970 *New Yorker* profile. I did not intend to imply that Illich used these pronouns before that moment or that he formulated them as systematic concepts.

Even so, the intuition those pronouns name—the tension between a living communion and the institutional form that bears it—predates their explicit appearance. As David Cayley shows in his review of Todd Hartch, Illich's formation in the sociology of religion during the 1950s already enabled him to see how much of what passes for Christianity can be bound up with cultural accretions and civic religion, and to warn that American missionaries might confuse the Gospel with "the particular form of their church" and become "ec-

3 Ivan Illich, *The Rivers North of the Future: The Testament of Ivan Illich, as told to David Cayley* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2005), 61.

clesiastic conquistadors."[4] Illich may not yet speak of *She* and *It* in those years, but he is already distinguishing sharply between the Gospel as mystery and the Church as a historically conditioned power.

For this reason, later interpreters (including David Cayley, Rosa Bruno-Jofré and Jon Igelmo Zaldívar, and more recently Neto Leão) use the *She*/*It* contrast as a shorthand for a pattern evident across Illich's work. My use of it reflects not an anachronistic projection but a participation in this interpretive lineage.[5] From within that lineage, and through the lens of maternal thinking, I read *She* as the living communion that continues to nurture life amid the ruins of *It*.

2. The 1972 interview and the "unworthy mother"

His second objection concerns my rendering of Illich's statement from the 1972 interview in Paris. My translation was undertaken with care. I consulted both the official English version on the recording and an independent translation, and I later confirmed my understanding with David Cayley, who accepted it. I acknowledge that nuances shift between French and English, yet I believe the spirit of Illich's remark, his acceptance of ambiguity and his sorrowful love for the Church as Mother, resonates clearly across versions. My phrasing was never meant to dissolve the paradox he cherished but to con-

4 David Cayley, "A Review of Todd Hartch's *The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the Modern West*," *davidcayley.com*, April 20, 2015.

5 As David Cayley writes, "Ivan Illich, from the beginning of his priesthood, had distinguished two forms of the Church, which he called the Church as *she* and the Church as *it*. To the first, the Church as the repository of tradition and the living embodiment of Christian community, he was, and always remained, deeply committed.... But to the second, the Church as self-serving, worldly power, he was, and remained, a thorn. (Cayley 2005, 4). "This distinction is fundamental to understanding Illich's work in Cuernavaca, Mexico" write Rosa Bruno-Jofré and Jon Igelmo Zaldívar, "Ivan Illich, the Critique of the Church as It: From a Vision of the Missionary to a Critique of Schooling," in *Catholic Education in the Wake of Vatican II*, edited by Rosa Bruno-Jofré and Jon Igelmo Zaldívar (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 135–152, p. 135.

vey the estrangement he saw when institutions claiming to serve love end up alienating it. Illich's maternal imagery gives us courage to remain her children even as we lament her failures. To call her unworthy is not to disown or disavow her; it is to acknowledge the drama of faith that binds us tighter still.

Before closing, I would like to ask Mr. Ullate for clarification on one phrase that I found particularly striking. He writes that my interpretation risks "returning us to the old paths of ideology." I would be grateful to understand more fully what he means by this. If by "ideology" he refers to the systematizing spirit Illich resisted, the transformation of paradox into program, then I share that concern. My intent was not to conceptualize Illich's insight but to explore how his living tension between love and critique might speak to those of us who inhabit different ecclesial worlds. For me, the *She/It* language is not a schema but a way of remaining attentive to that same living tension.

I remain thankful for Mr. Ullate's response, which has helped me revisit Illich's words with renewed attentiveness. Such exchange is, I believe, the truest way to honor Illich's legacy, the continuing conversation among friends who refuse both ideology and indifference, and who remain, despite our different tongues and traditions, children a visible and unfaithful Mother.

Translations

Sobre experiência estética e experiência religiosa*

de Ivan Illich

*Translation by Neto Leão and André Ribeiro***

Parte I

Reflexão sobre os limites da estética

Na última quinta-feira, o professor Justino Fernández[1] concluiu sua celebração sobre arte contemporânea com dois quadros: os monges de Dalí e a cúpula de Orozco. De um lado, os monges escondendo suas faces, em êxtase ou voltados para dentro de si; de outro, a forma da cúpula, consumida em sua própria radiância. Para que fosse possível perceber o sentido dessas duas pinturas, professor Fernández nos convidou a meditar em alguns esforços direcionados à apreensão dos limites daquilo que se pode dizer ou expressar. Considere o Guernica, e como ele oferece testemunho sobre

*Transcrição de notas para uma conferência sobre experiência estética e religiosa, partes I e II (10 de outubro de 1966). Publicado como "*Reflexión sobre los límites de la Estética*", em *Ensajos sobre la transcendencia*, I–II, CIDOC Sondeos 77 (Cuernavaca: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1971). Publicado sem revisão prévia do autor. Na edição italiana, Fabio Milana menciona que a palestra de Illich aconteceu nos dias 25 e 26 de outubro de 1966, o que explica o texto em duas partes. Ela fazia parte de um ciclo organizado pelo Instituto Mexicano de Psicoanálise, fundado por Erich Fromm em 1963 e dirigido por ele até 1965. O tema do ciclo de palestras era "*El hombre en el mundo moderno*".

** A seguinte tradução tomou como base o texto original em espanhol, *Transcripción de notas para una conferencia sobre la experiencia estética y la experiencia religiosa*, disponível online na plataforma *Acervus Ivan Illich*. Para uma tradução mais cuidadosa, cotejamos as versões inglesa, publica em *The Powerless Church* (2018), e italiana, publicada em *Celebrare la Consapevolezza* (2020). A versão italiana aparece no primeiro volume das obras completas de Ivan Illich e é acompanhada de preciosas notas, elaboradas por Fábio Milana, que ajudaram a esclarecer pontos agudos do texto. Todas as notas de texto são dos tradutores.

1 Refere-se ao Professor Justino Fernández (1904–1972), escritor, historiador, esteta, filósofo e acadêmico mexicano.

as atitudes humanas em face aos horrores da guerra; considere a representação de ideologias e religiões realizados pelos muralistas mexicanos, bem como seus arlequins e monstros e o paroxismo de coragem que eles expressam; considere a afirmação amorosa do ser e a permanência vívida das mulheres sentadas nos nus de Picasso ou Rivera.

Vamos em frente na aventura de explorar os limites do que é ser humano refletindo sobre isso, enquanto fazemos recurso a um número mínimo de conceitos fenomenológicos ou teológicos.

O homem hoje, em confronto com o religioso: este é o tema. A tomada de consciência por parte do homem de hoje de algo que as palavras falham em descrever. Não é nem religião, nem igreja, … não é o mito, tampouco é sequer ideologia (ilusões-projeções).

Tentaremos esboçar a situação deste homem, enquanto deixamos para o psicólogo a tarefa de falar sobre seus mitos e ao teólogo a tarefa de falar sobre Deus.

Ao abordar este tema nos deparamos com a ambiguidade das palavras que teríamos que usar para a análise; não obstante, se partirmos de uma imagem ao invés de um princípio o caminho se suavizará.

Fui criado à beira-mar. Lembro do dia em que o mar se aproximou de mim pela primeira vez e ouvi sua voz, a voz que sempre havia ouvido. Um pescador se aproximou e me deu uma concha, e na concha o mar falava comigo. Eu também me lembro da desilusão causada pelo meu professor do liceu. Ele insistiu que não era o canto do mar que eu ouvia na concha; era, ao contrário, somente os sons da rua. E, além disso, como eu poderia esquecer os sentimentos causados por ainda outra desilusão, dessa vez científica! Brunner me levou a suspeitar que o que a concha sussurrava não era nem as Nereidas nem Erínias, nem a deusa do cosmos, nem a deusa da polis. Era, na verdade, o fluxo do meu sangue, o pulsar

do meu próprio coração refletido no espelho da concha. O pescador adriático e o professor do liceu cada um me ensinou o seu idioma; então, projetando minha melodia íntima na trama de suas palavras, eu fui batizado, eu me desdobrei, e eu me transformei em drama.

A geração que nos precedeu sentiu-se forçada a interpretar minha relação com a concha em uma de quatro formas: era o canto do mar, o barulho das pessoas, a projeção da minha própria intimidade, ou – para os que acreditam – um Deus antropomórfico e nebuloso.

Dizemos: "Se a religião é uma destas alternativas, nós não temos necessidade alguma dela." Mas, e se for algo diferente? E se for uma incógnita?

Atitudes contemporâneas frente à Ilusão

Conhecemos e confessamos os nossos deuses, nossos mitos, as ideologias com as quais simplificamos a vida. Sabemos como os produzimos. Entendemos-nos criadores e produtos de mitos, ou somos iconoclastas ou caçadores de borboletas como eram no século passado; somos muito mais rigorosos com os mitos quando os selecionamos como tranquilizantes para nós mesmos. Entendemos-nos filhos da terra e seus mitos. Se há transcendência dos limites absolutos, que paradoxo!, se há mistério, devemos buscá-lo na terra, que não é acessível senão através dos seus mitos. Sabemos que herdamos tanto os mitos como os idiomas, os quais são a coloração das coisas. Que luta Peguy teve que travar para afirmá-lo em seu tempo. Tanto em filosofia analítica quanto em antropologia estrutural nós nos reconciliamos com os mitos. Sabemos que nem o pensamento racional nem – muito menos – o pensamento religioso pode ir além do mito, nem eles podem ser ditos em preto e branco. Nós descobrimos que não é uma questão de temer os mitos ou acreditar neles ou criá-los - isso seria infantil ou malicioso; do contrário,

nós devemos descobri-los e interpretá-los, saboreá-los com grande respeito e senso de humor, que é um jeito delicado de mostrá-los respeito. Mais ainda, nós devemos cuidar deles da mesma forma que cuidamos dos nomes, de acordo com o Livro do Gênesis, que Adão deu às coisas.

Pertencemos à geração que descobriu que suas mais transparentes realidades são as palavras em nossas mentes e corações, isto é, os nomes e os mitos. Assim como nós revelamos os órgãos da reprodução física, nós também descobrimos e desvelamos os organismos que produzem nossos ídolos.

Aos onze anos de idade já sabemos de onde vêm as crianças e os deuses. Todavia, assim que a puberdade termina suspeitamos que ainda há algo a mais a ser descoberto: o amor e a religião. Mas a religião não é uma palavra adequada. Eu direi isso de uma forma diferente: "encontrar-se conscientemente no limite do próprio ser pessoal".

História da desilusão

Se eu fosse capaz de descrever o caminho seguido pela nossa geração, eu o faria em termos de comédia romântica. Os atores seriam os diferentes grupos intelectuais. Para cada mito ou ideologia eu escolheria uma deusa. Eu me divertiria muitíssimo. Que sequência de romances e disputas, julgamentos públicos e vergonhosas concubinagens, divórcios e casamentos solenes. Haveria também um Don Juan Pareto determinado a não se casar, e um telegrama da OEA [Organização dos Estados Americanos] anunciando o fim da era ideológica. Infelizmente, eu não tenho nem o tempo nem os dons necessários para levar a cabo esta farsa.

Contudo, recordemos alguns momentos-chave do último ato deste drama, no qual somos os atores e no qual pertencemos à sétima geração, depois de Bacon, com sua tipologia simpática de ídolos: os ídolos antropomórficos da

tribo com a qual nascemos; os ídolos com os quais cada um se fecha na caverna de sua intimidade; os ídolos que compramos no mercado e os ídolos sintéticos criados pelos pensadores, e que mais tarde são vendidos nos teatros.

A própria ideia de falar sobre o homem moderno e a religião nos incomoda, porque parece que aquele que diz "homem moderno" está falando sobre um homem que foi capaz de superar os dois primeiros estágios de Comte: renunciou o recurso aos anjos e a uma estrutura metafísica, optando por preencher as lacunas de suas observações empíricas com sua ciência.

A formulação "homem moderno e religião" nos incomoda porque parece ingênua; aparenta ser a última tentativa de definir os seres humanos como seres religiosos, embora muitos de nós nos sintamos atraídos pelo romantismo: Goethe, Hegel ou Hölderlin.

Não podemos nos considerar homens modernos se não reagirmos à maneira de Feuerbach, se não aprendermos a enxergar em cada teogonia uma alienação: "o fato de sermos despojados de algo intimamente nosso, em troca de uma realidade ilusória". Lendo "A Vida de Jesus", de Strauss, contemporâneo de Feuerbach, não resisti à tentação de traduzir algumas frases para o espanhol, usando expressões idiomáticas: "Quem não tem ânsia [*no tiene ganas*], também não tem deuses… as ânsias [*las ganas*] são os desejos dos homens transformados em coisas".

O pensamento marxista nos toca profundamente. Lidamos friamente com ideologias — políticas, comerciais ou educacionais — sabendo que a função social de uma ideologia é confirmar a fé nos valores que um grupo precisa para agir, seja para lutar, obedecer ou comprar carros. Da psicanálise, aprendemos a duvidar se as razões que apresentamos são realmente os motivos de nossas atitudes, e não temos vergonha de discuti-las.

Somos da geração de Heisenberg; renunciamos a ver ou imaginar o átomo ou o cosmos; e minha sobrinha, aos onze anos, estudando álgebra de Boleyn no ensino fundamental, toma consciência de sua liberdade de escolher os axiomas do sistema com o qual gostaria de pensar.

Os resultados da desilusão

Aprendemos a tratar todos os mitos, ideologias e religiões como ilusões e, ao mesmo tempo, a estar cientes da ambiguidade inerente a todas as ilusões. Será esta ilusão uma criação poética de grande valor social, pedagógico, terapêutico ou político? Ou, antes, uma alienação neurótica, um instrumento de isolamento, dominação e destruição?

A síntese dos múltiplos esforços de sete gerações começa na nossa. A maioria dos fenômenos que, há quinze anos, seriam considerados religiosos, já não os incluímos sob esse rótulo. Se os incluíssemos, teríamos de inventar um novo nome para servir de título a esta conferência. E, de fato, é isso que proponho. O título seria então: "O Homem Moderno, o Mito e a Transcendência".

Perdemos o entusiasmo do jovem Marx pelas geniais demonstrações de Feuerbach. Como sociólogos, elas parecem-nos simplistas. Perdemos o horror que as nossas avós sentiam ao pensar em Marx ou Freud roubando-lhes a religião. Agora, o oposto está acontecendo: queremos que eles nos ajudem, nos iluminem, dissipem nossas ilusões. Perdemos o "*pathos*" iconoclasta de nossos antepassados, assim como a necessidade de invocar um "*deus ex machina*" para explicar uma série de fenômenos mágicos, místicos e religiosos que antes eram inexplicáveis sem a sua intervenção. Hoje não precisamos de Deus — como veremos adiante — nem mesmo para explicar mitos ou misticismo.

Por outro lado, testemunhamos um novo poder do homem sobre os demônios que ele próprio não sabe controlar.

Observamos com horror a industrialização da mitogonia[2], a Madison Avenue que produz substitutos religiosos para facilitar a sintonia dos hábitos do homem urbano; a técnica dos oficiais estadunidenses, capazes de quebrar qualquer prisioneiro vietcongue em cinco dias — sem dor física ou drogas — tão somente com dosagens de simpatia sintética: o que nos lembra da gratidão do prisioneiro de Dachau ao seu comandante da SS, assim como as drogas psicodélicas nos lembram do "soma" de Huxley. Reconhecemos os espíritos que ativam as ortodoxias de McCarthy, Mao, Lysenko ou das escolas psicanalíticas. Somos capazes de discernir a urgência com que o povo clama por sua religião; vemos isso no crescente número de fiéis que tanto interessa aos antropólogos americanos, assim como nas manifestações litúrgicas em Nuremberg, naqueles que observamos sentados em frente à televisão ou na chegada dos Beatles a Nova York. Qual o significado de todos esses fenômenos? Se eu não os chamar de religiosos, não me limitarei demasiadamente? E se eu os chamar de religiosos, devo ceder a palavra a um dos muitos psiquiatras presentes. Permitam-me chamá-los de "míticos". À luz deles, considero a posição de Feuerbach admirável e gostaria de adotar a seguinte citação dele: "Sou médico de doenças da cabeça e do coração. Sei que a maioria das pessoas sofre de problemas estomacais, mas não seria possível que muitos problemas estomacais tivessem origem na cabeça? Decidi, de uma vez por todas, especializar-me nas doenças da cabeça e do coração de toda a humanidade. O que nos propomos a fazer deve ser feito com consciência, permanecendo fiéis a nós mesmos."

Tarefa verdadeiramente tremenda é que cada um de nós aceite a sua própria responsabilidade pelo espírito da convivência futura, sem nos refugiarmos nos curtos-circuitos

2 Entende-se por mitogonia, corroborando a tradução de Fabio Milana à edição Italiana, a "industrialização da criação de mitos" ou "a mitopoiesis".

despersonalizantes do "controle de natalidade" [*birthcontrol*] espiritual, ou "controle dos mitos" [*mithcontrol*], como tem sido recentemente denominado.

A experiência mística

Existe uma categoria especial dentro do conjunto das chamadas experiências religiosas. Há um consenso universal sobre os fenômenos que pertencem a essa categoria; e esse consenso — por mais estranho que pareça — abrange todos os séculos e todos os continentes.

Trata-se de um fenômeno cuja realidade é protagonizada por algumas pessoas que, por sua vez, se tornam testemunhas para outras. Essas testemunhas são sempre pessoas de natureza simples, doce, muito "humana". Frequentemente, são pessoas que dedicaram suas vidas a se preparar para o encontro com esse fenômeno. E todas afirmam que, antes de encontrá-lo, não tinham ideia do que poderia ser. Quanto mais o buscavam, mais se surpreendiam. Depois, passaram a falar dele apenas em metáforas ou parábolas.

Muitos nomes foram dados a esse fenômeno, como Tao (Lao-Tsé), Brahmaatman, Prajna, Tasawuf… na tradição bíblica, ele não possui esses nomes técnicos. Aqueles que o conhecem o distinguem de qualquer outro fenômeno, de qualquer outra experiência, realidade, pessoa ou coisa. Com uma precisão singular, distingue-se das diversas experiências subjetivas comumente conhecidas como "religiosas" ou "místicas".

Na falta de uma palavra melhor, chamá-la-ei de "mística transcendental" ou, ainda mais simples, "experiência mística": a experiência do Absoluto na experiência pura da transcendência ou do mistério. Naturalmente, a palavra "experiência" não é suficiente quando aplicada ao Mistério, ao Absoluto, ao transcendental; mas não temos outra escolha

senão usá-la.

As metáforas, palavras e paradoxos usados para descrever essa experiência variam de acordo com o ambiente de onde provém o místico; contudo, seu significado permanece sempre o mesmo: a experiência do mistério, a coincidência dos opostos.

Os testemunhos dessa experiência são múltiplos, e parecem se acumular nos ambientes, épocas e tradições onde se cultivava a preparação para à mistica. Não sabemos se essa concentração de testemunhos da experiência decorre da maior ou menor capacidade do monge de descrever a mística ou de vivê-la. Os exercícios de concentração, oração e abnegação, praticados em todas as épocas e lugares, permitem que as pessoas falem sobre sua experiência; e com isso, o número de místicos realmente aumenta? Outra questão que permanece aberta à discussão.

Aqui estão algumas características da experiência mística sobre as quais há um consenso universal:

- É uma experiência que se pode esperar pacientemente, mas que não pode ser produzida ou obtida. Tampouco se sabe se ela chegará; muito menos quando.
-É uma experiência que se manifesta de duas maneiras distintas: como um lampejo fugaz cujo rastro jamais se apaga, ou como um nascimento para uma nova vida.
-É uma experiência profundamente humana. Ela torna a pessoa que a vivenciou mais humana, a ponto de conseguir ler os corações das outras pessoas e sorrir de uma maneira especial.

Cada uma das grandes escolas ou tradições místicas insiste na gratuidade da experiência e, simultaneamente, na adequação de certas práticas para facilitar o seu advento. Do ponto de vista doutrinal, elas têm em comum: a insistência em certos

exercícios (oração, renúncia, disciplina, concentração), com a constante advertência de que tais exercícios devem purificar o ser humano, e que não servem diretamente para provocar a experiência mística. Da mesma forma, as grandes escolas convergem nos critérios para ajudar o discípulo a desprezar qualquer experiência pseudomística ou "mítica", experiência essa que é naturalmente muito frequente entre aqueles que dedicam suas vidas à contemplação.

A autonomia da experiência mística

Mistério e mito geram experiências semelhantes, pois ambos nos permitem sair da prisão do definível. Somente aqueles que renascem do espírito podem discernir o conteúdo das experiências. Para os não iniciados, a experiência gerada pelo mistério e a experiência gerada pelo mito distinguem-se apenas pelos seus frutos. Santo Inácio resumiu a sabedoria de milênios quando disse que, por mera observação, o anjo da luz não pode ser distinguido do anjo das trevas, pois este último tende a disfarçar-se de anjo da luz. Mas, em seus frutos, certamente diferem.

O mito gera a pseudomística da vagueza equívoca e do entusiasmo (o "Viva!" "Heil!" à gogó, fanatismo). O mistério, por outro lado, gera a embriaguez sóbria que sustenta a espera na noite, no deserto, no nada.

Há sempre o perigo de confundir o vago com o vazio. Se não se submete à métrica poética, o indefinido oprime e sufoca aquele que o busca. Quanto mais nos aproximamos do mistério, mais ele se torna transcendente, gratuito, livremente concedido, pela graça.

Sabemos que tanto o mito quanto o mistério ajudam a quebrar o "vaso da mesquinhez individual" (para continuar com Nietzsche), mas com objetivos opostos. O mito molda o indivíduo atribuindo-lhe um papel definido em uma trama dramática, enquanto o mistério desafia o indivíduo a buscar

uma personalização progressiva para confrontar o Outro, que permanece sempre transcendente e, portanto, misterioso.

A pseudomística, a mística produzida pelo fascínio do mito ou alcançada por meio de drogas e esforços técnicos, é, de fato, uma experiência de transcendência para o indivíduo. Mas é uma experiência de inserção, de despersonalização por meio da inserção no tecido telúrico do "povo" [*Volk*] e sangue, no tecido de uma história que se torna uma trama ou organismo necessário; inserção em algum "papel" predeterminado e, portanto, despersonalizante; inserção em um coro de devotos, de estrelas do cinema ou do céu, de santos ou ideias científicas.

O confronto final do indivíduo com os seus próprios limites também pode produzir uma experiência de transcendência. Mas essa não é uma transcendência em direção à inserção. Nicolau de Cusa diz: "Entra na densidade da realidade. A essência da realidade é permeada pelo infinito, que é a coincidência dos opostos". O místico é mais pessoal, mais independente, mais vital, mais criativo; é um homem de amor transbordante. Na tradição cristã, desenvolveu-se um único critério de "autenticação" dessa experiência: o amor simples, humilde, heroico e casto. Existe uma qualidade no processo de personalização do amor que na tradição cristã recebeu o nome de "castidade". Não tem nada a ver com a abstinência no casamento; refere-se antes à incomparabilidade de dois amores, quaisquer que sejam, a santidade ou a personalização, e disponibilidade, acessibilidade aos pobres.

A secularização da experiência mística

Até alguns anos atrás, a distinção entre experiência mítica e mística seria absurda em um lugar como este. Pergunto-me se ainda o é. Contudo, creio que agora podemos fomentar o estudo empírico dessa personalização adicional e não convencional do ser humano que ocorre dentro dele por

meio da maturação e do amor.

As ilusões aumentaram, assim como nossa capacidade de desvendá-las e, se necessário, refutá-las. Espero que, na mesma proporção, aumente nossa capacidade de distinguir não apenas o ilusório do real, mas também o real do ilusório: a capacidade de distinguir mitos de realidades espirituais. Com o mesmo rigor com que aprendemos a duvidar metodicamente da intervenção de Deus na produção de fenômenos religiosos, podemos agora também duvidar da possibilidade de reduzir todo fenômeno místico à ilusão. Teologicamente, podemos formular a seguinte hipótese: a experiência mística nada mais é do que uma experiência particular da realidade, acessível especialmente ao homem maduro. É a experiência que o homem profundamente personalizado adquire de sua livre interdependência no amor; é a experiência oposta à embriaguez das ilusões, dos deuses e das coisas; é a experiência da coexistência. Para o crente, essa experiência produz uma transformação particular de sua fé.

A secularização do estágio de purificação

A luta contra as ilusões da sensibilidade (imaginação), do coração e do intelecto sempre constituiu, em todas as tradições, a primeira etapa na mudança para a perfeição: o processo de purificação, a "noite dos sentidos" e, sobretudo, a "noite do espírito", segundo a grande tradição espanhola. Creio que esse processo de purificação se tornou hoje acessível a todos, para além de qualquer tradição religiosa, numa nova corrente secular. Ao secularizar o ideal humanista (tornando-o profano, distanciando-o de toda religiosidade), o caminho purgativo do convento foi transferido para a escola pública. Talvez eu esteja sendo excessivamente otimista quanto à prática; mas aqui falo de uma questão de princípio. A libertação do homem de suas ilusões é uma tarefa profana e um compromisso tão profundo para os heróis de nossa geração

que, com ela, poderíamos acabar numa outra ideologia.

Essa secularização do processo de "libertação", "educação" ou "personalização" encontrou enorme resistência dentro da Igreja Católica; Cuernavaca é um símbolo disso. Compreendo as razões da resistência, mas não é resistindo ao inevitável que a sabedoria ascética e mística acumulada ao longo dos séculos será salva. Ela será salva investindo-a no século e contribuindo para o século através dela.

Em todas as tradições místicas, o estágio de purificação distingue-se claramente de outro, frequentemente chamado de iluminação, que por vezes ocorre simultaneamente ao primeiro. Em todas as tradições, esse estágio leva a certas experiências características, a uma nova atitude em relação às coisas, às pessoas e às ilusões.

Seria fascinante se os psicólogos humanistas continuassem a análise — e, portanto, a secularização — desses fenômenos.

Sei muito bem o que é recomendado a um cristão ou a um muçulmano quando chegam ao fim de sua vida purgativa. Mas vocês, psiquiatras humanistas, que caminho espiritual vislumbram para a pessoa que chega a esse ponto? Da perspectiva de um humanismo aberto à transcendência, esse homem está terminando sua infância espiritual. E depois da análise, o que acontece? Devemos abandoná-lo a si mesmo, para que busque seu próprio caminho? Isso não seria contrário à sabedoria universal? Não é este o momento em que abundam regressões, desânimos e quedas tradicionalmente irremediáveis? Ou a purificação das ilusões tem um propósito meramente especulativo: tornar o homem capaz de viver em sua sociedade reconhecendo as ilusões, individuais e coletivas, como tais, mas permanecendo, no entanto, condenado a viver como se não as conhecesse? Ou devemos dizer-lhe, nesse ponto, para se converter a alguma religião? Limito-me a levantar a questão.

A tradição me diz que o limiar da iluminação é um dos momentos mais críticos da vida espiritual; é o momento em que o barco ainda não desfraldou as velas e já se sente a necessidade de arriscar remar contra a corrente: é o momento das recaídas, aquelas que – segundo a tradição – tornam a recuperação muito difícil.

O novo não-teísmo

Ah, como sinto a dificuldade de falar de santidade em termos seculares em uma língua ocidental. Que emaranhado herdamos da nossa cristandade: não há uma única palavra importante que, nos últimos dois mil anos, não tenha passado algum tempo no seminário ou no púlpito. Creio que a dificuldade seria menor se pudéssemos conversar em um contexto oriental. Surge a questão: você fala conosco sobre santidade sem se referir explicitamente a Deus? Sim e não. Falaremos sobre isso amanhã. Até agora, não falamos de Deus com "D" maiúsculo.

Hoje, raramente se fala de Deus — em público — em termos categóricos, afirmando ou negando algum aspecto Dele. Por outro lado, a discussão é reacendida em termos não categóricos. O diálogo sobre este tema foi interrompido por dois séculos; e refiro-me a diálogo, não a gritos, apologias ou controvérsias.

O tema do diálogo revivido é simples: "Deus não pode ser assim". Ateus, crentes praticantes e agnósticos participam desse diálogo. Eles têm em comum o fato de serem simultaneamente não-teístas e a-deístas. Não-teístas no sentido de que o Deus em questão não possui as características de um Deus mítico e "religioso"; a-deístas porque simultaneamente renunciam a uma divindade metafísica e impessoal. O diálogo tornou-se possível porque os anti-teístas aprenderam a ter um pouco de senso de humor e descobriram o fanatismo de sua agressividade. Ao mesmo tempo, os teólogos perderam a

certeza de possuir a revelação.

Duas gerações se passaram, e o diálogo sobre o problema da transcendência da pessoa humana, sustentado por filósofos, ateus e crentes, continua: pense na literatura francesa e no existencialismo, de Kierkegaard e Dostoiévski a Camus.

Devemos o estabelecimento desse diálogo aos teólogos kerigmáticos (isto é, aqueles atentos à mensagem): Bultmann, Barth, Tillich, Balthasar, De Lubac. E, finalmente, devemos ao pastor Bonhoeffer e ao bispo e teólogo Robinson. Esse diálogo se popularizou, e devemos à revista Time o fato de ele ter degenerado em vagueza, assim como devemos a ela a morte de Deus[3].

Os teólogos descobriram que a maneira como os crentes falam sobre Deus é incompreensível para os não crentes. Ora, na teologia existem dois tipos de incompreensibilidade: uma é o paradoxo, o escândalo. Mas o Deus demonstrado pelos apologistas é um paliativo. E tal Deus não faz sentido. Vou caricaturar a situação aqui, conforme resumido pelo Bispo Robinson: "Deus é intelectualmente supérfluo; emocionalmente, podemos viver sem Ele, e moralmente Ele é intolerável". Essas afirmações foram repetidas tantas vezes que se tornaram sem sentido. Mas agora estão sendo revividas e assumindo uma intensidade insuspeita. E a razão pela qual assumem tal intensidade é que aqueles que as estão descobrindo são crentes em um Deus vivo.

Deus é intelectualmente supérfluo. Napoleão ficou escandalizado quando Laplace lhe disse que Deus não cabia em seu sistema, que ele não precisava dele como hipótese. Quando as milhões de pessoas urbanizadas — os "filhos de Sánchez"[4] — forem educadas, deixarão para seus filhos a

3 "Is God Dead?" [Deus está morto?] é a famosa manchete de capa da revista Time, de 8 de abril de 1966, que inaugurou o sucesso popular da chamada "teologia da morte de Deus". Nota parcialmente reproduzida aqui a partir da referida edição italiana.

4 "Referência ao livro do antropólogo americano Oscar Lewis, *Os Filhos de Sánchez*

tarefa de preencher, como pesquisadores, as "lacunas" do Cosmos. No plano emocional, podemos prescindir de Deus. Os machões sabem disso: apesar de suas críticas às políticas governamentais, preferem a Previdência Social e a penicilina à Providência. Penso nisso toda vez que vejo um padre fazendo o sinal da cruz na decolagem de um avião. Mesmo sem nos sentirmos dominados por um mito de planejamento, sabemos que seria indigno incluir a providência divina entre os fatores de imprevisibilidade. Finalmente, é moralmente inaceitável acrescentar ao erro de um piloto uma decisão homicida de um ser supremo.

Talvez amanhã eu possa elaborar sobre os motivos pelos quais os crentes redescobrem essas posições à medida que crescem em sua fé. O curioso é que o diálogo ao qual me refiro — o diálogo sobre "não pode ser assim" — é formativo. Envolve uma renúncia à arrogância tanto para crentes quanto para não crentes. Para ambos, é uma experiência de humildade. Aqueles que não creem em um Deus pessoal devem renunciar ao seu Deus ideológico e abstrato para participar do diálogo.

L'humanité de Comte perdeu seu nimbo mítico-religiosa. Não merece a confiança utópica do século passado, retratada por Orozco em sua cúpula. O crente, por sua vez, renuncia a estar ao lado de Deus em um pacto de defesa mútua, em busca de familiaridade com O Santo... uma atitude que creio detectar nos monges de Dalí.

Aquele que crê aceita do ateu a ideia de que um Deus que pode ser adicionado ao mundo é absurdo, que um mundo-mais-Deus não pode ser um mundo melhor. E o antigo anti-teísta chega a perceber como facilmente substituiu sua agressão pelo trono do aflito.

Há duas entradas para o deserto: a noite e o cume. Para que essa solidão não seja a de Nietzsche, temos a liberdade

(1961), sobre uma família das favelas da Cidade do México". Nota parcialmente reproduzida aqui a partir da referida edição italiana.

de encará-la com humildade, com aquela curiosidade impertinente que é a esperança.

Parte II

Introdução

Ontem falamos sobre a atitude moderna em relação ao fenômeno religioso. Falamos sobre os deuses como criações humanas: seus mitos, ideologias, ilusões. Falamos de uma geração que aprendeu a se mover livremente por seus fantasmas; para eles, era como viver no salão de um castelo onde, a cada instante, uma cortina diferente era aberta e outro espelho aparecia atrás dela. Havia duas maneiras de se mover nesse salão. A primeira incluía as pessoas que não conseguiam encontrar uma saída e acabavam se conformando; a segunda incluía aquelas que procuravam uma janela, esperavam por ela ou suspeitavam dela, ou pelo menos não a excluíam.

Nossos avós tiraram as imagens dos santos da parede; nossos pais decretaram que tudo o que é de vidro é um espelho; e nossa geração, acostumada à precisão, diz: "Isto, pelo menos, não é uma janela".

Ontem, formulamos uma esperança, uma interpretação otimista de um possível desenvolvimento. Quando as cortinas se entreabriram, nossos avós pensaram que estavam olhando através de janelas. Eles resistiram a Marx e Freud, que negavam a transparência daqueles vidros. Nossos pais, fanáticos por higiene, despiram as paredes, procurando espelhos, e ficaram paralisados pelos demônios que apareceram diante de seus olhos: fascinados ou espantados. E nossos contemporâneos estão dispostos a se submeter ao Juízo do Processo neste castelo, para dizê-lo com Kafka. Alguns deles hoje se consideram capazes de analisar a natureza das paredes.

Concluímos nossa reflexão com um relance ao novo diálogo sobre Deus. Concluímos nossa reflexão com uma

análise do novo diálogo sobre Deus. Esse diálogo está enraizado em um ateísmo que historicamente só poderia surgir em um ambiente ocidental: em um homem formado pelo cristianismo e, posteriormente, pela ciência. O conceito de "encarnação" de Deus foi tão purificado que hoje todos preferimos não acreditar no Deus verdadeiro a acreditar em um Deus antropomórfico. Essa atitude é comum a crentes e não crentes.

Hoje, compararei o pensamento cristão com este ambiente moderno. Essa comparação se resume à seguinte imagem: "Não há janela, e o reino de Deus está entre nós. Devo crer nele e, portanto, buscá-lo; ou devo encontrá-lo e, então, reconhecê-lo. Alguns só perceberão isso no momento da morte, como o famoso 'bom ladrão'. Mas uma coisa é certa: não há janela. Há, sim, muros. Um dia, porém, todo o castelo, com seus muros e espelhos, desabará com um estrondo".

O modo de proceder será o seguinte: 1) o reino apresentado pelos Evangelhos; 2) possui analogias com a esperança ou experiência mística que discutimos ontem; 3) e é particularmente acessível ao pensamento moderno; 4) enquanto a fé no reino só se concretiza por meio da identificação com uma comunidade de fé.

Perspectiva da apresentação do Evangelho

A razão pela qual apresento aqui a posição cristã é primordialmente metodológica: reacender o interesse da pesquisa psicológica pela motivação e orientação da maturidade humana; a psicologia do homem no limiar daquilo que a tradição chamava de "iluminação". O que resta depois da análise? Um oceano sem bússola? Uma Terra redonda que nos leva de volta ao ponto de partida? A solidão soberba de Nietzsche, ou a solidão humilde de Sartre, ou uma fé esperançada em mim mesmo? Um homem que sabe o que é a sua vida e qual a sua meta?

Nas tradições místicas, o estágio de purificação é

seguido pelo estágio de iluminação; contudo, eles podem coincidir parcialmente. A purificação, que se tornou um fenômeno profano, procede da desilusão sistemática com a atmosfera do nosso século. E depois do exorcismo, o quê? Segundo o Evangelho, existem certos demônios que só podem ser expulsos com jejum e oração. Demônios que não foram devidamente banidos vão para o deserto em busca de reforços e, quando retornam, encontram seus aposentos bem-preparados. Penso em Orwell e Huxley.

Será que somente o homem que descobriu os espelhos é capaz de oferecer incenso ao demônio, sabendo quem é? A literatura ascética é riquíssima em relatos das armadilhas enfrentadas pelo homem que alcança a liberdade. O que guiará o homem no limiar da maturidade, determinado e capaz de "discernir os espíritos", e capaz de se engajar na "luta contra o domínio dos demônios"?

Será que o que guia o homem é a submissão a uma "regra" tradicional: o yoga, o zen, a disciplina poética do Tao? Um conjunto de práticas que evita qualquer teogênese? Uma regra que incorpora os frutos de experiências milenares, uma regra que seria o repositório da sabedoria retrospectiva daqueles que atingirem a plena maturidade?

Ou será uma dinâmica interna? Uma tendência inata ao florescimento da personalidade, florescimento que com surpresa se tornará consciente e poderá, eventualmente, constituir uma experiência mística como a que descrevi ontem?

Ou será o sustento de uma fé, de um conjunto de proposições e paradoxos sobre um mistério no qual acredito plenamente, mesmo sem tê-lo experimentado?

A "santidade dos pagãos" tem despertado grande interesse na teologia moderna: Maritain, Ohm, Massignon, Gardet, Merton. Como será possível o pleno florescimento da pessoa se ela não puder contar com o apoio orientador da fé

ao longo de sua jornada?

A resposta do teólogo cristão é: a fé implícita, ainda informe, semelhante a um instinto sobrenatural, impulsiona o "pagão" a florescer. O homem que efetivamente aceitou a desilusão progressiva, o homem que, portanto, se encontra no limiar do caminho que conduz à maturidade, se vê guiado por essa fé, mesmo quando não sabe "que fé é essa". E por isso, pode prosseguir em sua busca pela perfeição na única direção em que ela pode ser encontrada: no risco de um humanismo, para além de toda ideologia; na renúncia à segurança que advém do apego a uma verdade cujo conteúdo é concebido como dogma; para além de qualquer certeza que proporcione segurança psicológica.

Apresentarei a fé explícita (em Cristo) que, segundo o teólogo, guia o crente em sua busca pela santidade; porque conheço por experiência direta o poder orientador dessa fé, e é desta fé que posso falar. Farei isso com a esperança de que contribua para os esforços do psicólogo em explorar aquela fé que chamo de implícita e que orienta o "não crente".

Características do reino pregado por Jesus

Os Evangelhos foram escritos por uma geração de crentes ainda muito próxima de Jesus. Constituem, portanto, o relato de memórias intensas, repletas de sua vida e de seus ditos. O imenso trabalho crítico dos últimos oitenta anos nos permite alcançar, por meio deles, a personalidade histórica de Jesus.

Boa parte de seus ditos são contos: parábolas, metáforas, paradoxos. É típico da sabedoria semítica expressar em contos aquilo que é importante; cada história tem seu sentido, e não é a história em si que conta, mas o seu sentido. Há anos me submeto a um teste ao ler o Evangelho: se consigo sorrir, provavelmente entendi.

Grande parte dos contos evangélicos se refere ao

"reino". O reino chega e não há como detê-lo; quem tem ouvidos para ouvir o entende. Ele chega à noite, inesperadamente, como um ladrão; o dia do Senhor chega; é fonte de paz e alegria para os crentes e escândalo para os que o rejeitam; os crentes são libertos dos demônios, cujo poder terminou. Paradoxalmente, isso não significa que esse poder se esgotou completamente; para cada crente chega a hora da escuridão extrema; todo crente carrega sua cruz.

O reino está sob o signo da cruz, e entre a sua chegada e o seu cumprimento está a cruz; entre a vitória do indivíduo sobre os poderes demoníacos e a sua entrada no reino está a derrota da cruz; entre a luz da fé e a visão está a noite paradoxal do sepultamento.

O reino vem, e já está. É o reino de Deus que vem, e que já está entre nós (não, subjetivamente, "em" cada um de nós — muito menos cosmologicamente além de nós — mas entre nós). É o Messias que o descobre e o revela. Assim como o Messias está sempre à porta, também o reino está sempre "já" presente: neste momento, na morte, na *parousia*. É difícil distinguir esses três momentos; porque o reino se cumpriu, segundo as Escrituras, mesmo quando ainda não se tenha realizado plenamente. É uma realidade paradoxal: "já" e, ao mesmo tempo, "ainda não". Os crentes celebram a sua presença e aguardam a sua chegada. É a vitória sobre os demônios e a derrota sob o domínio dos poderes frenéticos que conduzem à cruz.

N.B. Gosto muito da primeira representação que temos da cruz. É um grafite do século II da zona vermelha de Roma: um corpo humano com cabeça de asno. Uma representação do paradoxo, do absurdo. E abaixo, esta inscrição: (fulano) "saúda seu Deus"[5].

5 "O chamado 'grafite palatino'", hoje encontrado no Museu Antiquário do Palatino, "traz a inscrição grega '*Alexamenos sebete theon*' ('venera [seu] Deus')". Nota parcialmente reproduzida aqui a partir da referida edição italiana.

Não me importa se a intenção do "artista" era blasfema; corresponde à realidade do mistério: o reino se cumpre sem realização utópica e se realizará sem ser apocalíptico.

Aspectos da mensagem que especificam o "reino"

O reino é estabelecido pela lei do amor. Que lei seria essa? Que lei poderia definir o amor? Esse era o problema oculto na pergunta que os fariseus fizeram ao Rabi Yeshua. Eles queriam encurralá-lo; queriam fazê-lo cair no paradoxo fundamental que surge da necessidade de afirmar a importância de estabelecer o reino sob a lei e, ao mesmo tempo, no amor. "O que devo fazer para entrar no teu reino?", pergunta-lhe um doutor da lei. "Observa a lei", lhe responde; o amor a Deus e ao próximo, que são uma só e a mesma lei. "Quem é o meu próximo?", pergunta-lhe novamente. E Jesus conta a parábola do samaritano: "Um homem descia de Jerusalém para Jericó, e caiu nas mãos de ladrões, que lhe tiraram a roupa, espancaram-no e fugiram, deixando-o meio morto. Por acaso, um sacerdote descia pela estrada e, ao vê-lo, desviou-se. Da mesma forma, um levita, passando por ali, viu-o e passou direto. Mas um samaritano, que ia de viagem, chegou perto dele, e quando o viu foi movido de compaixão; aproximou-se, enfaixou-lhe as feridas, derramando nelas azeite e vinho; colocou-o sobre o seu próprio animal, levou-o para uma hospedaria e cuidou dele. De manhã, tirou dois denários, deu-os ao hospedeiro e disse-lhe: 'Cuide dele, e tudo o que gastar a mais, eu lhe pagarei quando voltar'. Qual destes três, na tua opinião, foi o próximo do homem que caiu nas mãos dos ladrões?" (Lucas 10:30-36).

Tenhamos cuidado: não lhes diz quem agiu como convém a um próximo; com esta parábola, lhes aponta quem era o próximo, porque escolheu agir como tal. O doutor da lei tinha perguntado: "Quem é o meu próximo?" e a resposta é muito clara: o seu próximo é aquele a quem você escolhe amar

com ânsia [*con ganas*].

Mas a pergunta se repete: quem está no reino? E aqui ele pinta um quadro mais extremo do que a cúpula de Orozco ou os monges de Dalí, um quadro mais do tipo Guernica; o quadro do juízo final. Sabendo o que fazem ou não, aqueles que dão água aos sedentos entram no reino.

Filipe lhe disse: mostra-me o Pai, e Ele responde: há tanto tempo que estás comigo, e ainda não sabes que quem me vê, vê o Pai?

Se fosse possível purificar ainda mais a "ideia" de Deus, nenhuma ideia restaria. Compreendemos Karl Barth — o grande teólogo reformado — quando ele diz: a mensagem toca o mundo como a tangente toca o círculo.

Finalmente, ele os ensina a orar. Pai nosso: juntamente com o Messias, somos filhos de Deus para que possamos ser irmãos d'Ele.

Que estais nos céus: não no além, lá fora, mas nos céus, no universo. Não no vazio, mas no universo, assim como o reino está entre nós.

Santificado seja o Teu nome (por favor, não o mencione... aos judeus era proibido pronunciar este nome... está santificado do mundo, separado dele).

Venha o Teu reino: ele já está entre nós... que a Tua "santidade" se manifeste nele, santidade como socialização (ou sociedade).

Analogia entre "reino" e experiência mística

Interessa-nos a analogia entre as características da experiência mística transcendental e as determinações do "reino". Somente sob este signo creio ser possível estabelecer empiricamente uma relação psicológica entre o reino e uma possível orientação rumo à maturidade humanística. Vocês devem ter notado que a descrição evangélica do reino inclui elementos essenciais, usados na descrição da experiência

mística; acrescenta ou explicita outros. Acrescenta a dimensão social: o reino está entre nós; acrescenta uma dimensão para-temporal: cumprido — mas não consumado — isto é, sob o signo da cruz. Explicita o realismo: o reino já existe socialmente entre e consiste no progresso do amor. Portanto, é profundamente social e pessoal.

Permito-me uma formulação hipotética: o reino é o que constitui a autêntica experiência mística, se o místico souber o que realmente a constitui. No crente, a experiência mística é a experiência consciente do reino antes da *parousia*. A experiência mística é fruto do amor e, portanto, acessível a todo amante. A consciência do seu significado é fruto da fé e acessível apenas ao crente.

A esperança no reino orienta a humanização do crente

Abordamos a figura histórica e a experiência pessoal do Nazareno por meio de um esboço de sua mensagem sobre o reino. Detivemo-nos em alguns aspectos dessa mensagem que hoje são de particular interesse. Chegamos ao fim de nossa indagação. Como é possível que a intimidade pessoal de uma figura histórica se torne princípio norteador ou vital para o indivíduo de outra época histórica? Como revelar (descobrir ou tornar compreensível) ao homem da estrada que o mistério ao qual ele nebulosamente tende é na verdade o luminoso "reino" de Jesus? Somente assim poderíamos "evangelizar" sua experiência humana, fazer renascer como aspiração à santidade tipicamente cristã uma veleidade provavelmente sepultada, não consciente e pouco definida.

Para dizê-lo em modo mais simples, a maioria das pessoas não têm experiências místicas e nunca as terá. Nesse caso, não se trata de revelar-lhes o significado de uma experiência, mas a existência de uma tendência. A posição especulativa que apresento aqui baseia-se em conclusões teológicas. Todo homem é chamado à santidade, cada qual

em seu ambiente real. Não sei se é possível determinar empiricamente que a tendência à transcendência (a mística, o autenticamente religioso) constitui uma parte normal não consciente da vivência de cada homem.

À pergunta: como revelar a mensagem cristã ao indivíduo? A única resposta é: "pela fé". A fé que é tomada de consciência de uma tendência pré-consciente. A fé que é também a tomada de responsabilidade pelo desenvolvimento ulterior desta tendência. A fé que é aceitação do dom da própria vivência que Jesus Cristo concede ao crente. A fé não é a aceitação de uma doutrina; é um compromisso de buscar, com dedicação e risco, a identificação pessoal e íntima com a intimidade de outra pessoa. Rabi Yeshua ben Josef, como objeto dessa fé, é meu irmão e amigo Jesus, o Senhor Filho de Deus. Os últimos trinta anos abriram novas possibilidades de falar e de conhecer. Naquela época, nos círculos científicos, havia uma prevenção massiva a todo conhecimento que não fosse conceitual. Se existe prevenção hoje, é contra toda conceitualização.

Transmissão histórica da mensagem

Para descrever como conduzir o indivíduo a essa fé (ou mantê-lo afastado dela), como aproximá-lo do objeto (que é, na verdade, o sujeito) de sua fé, preciso usar outro termo técnico da teologia. É uma palavra mais corrompida e equivocada do que "fé" ou "santidade". O indivíduo pode chegar à fé somente por meio da Igreja. Igreja, aqui, significa uma comunidade de crentes. Psicologicamente, isso parece claro; não se trata da comunicação de conceitos, de imagens ou de símbolos. Trata-se da minha identificação fraterna com a vivência de um irmão, cuja expressão é "o reino". E o reino é uma realidade social de magnitude transcendental. Portanto, ele não pode ser comunicado senão em e por meio de uma vivência comunitária e fraterna. Historicamente, foi assim que Jesus o fez. E hoje,

não pode ser feito senão na comunhão da fé e da esperança messiânica própria de uma comunidade fraterna.

A transmissão da fé é fruto do testemunho, não do ensino conceitual; é fruto da realização do reino no coração da testemunha, com o qual o neófito pode se identificar; e não é fruto da convicção intelectual alcançada por meio de alguma doutrina. Mas a doutrina na Igreja é certamente importante. Os dogmas cristãos têm pelo menos a mesma função que os dogmas de Huineng ou dos sufistas: são negações para excluir a intrusão de mitos na busca do mistério.

A fé se manifesta ritualmente na celebração dos mistérios do reino, dos símbolos de Sua presença. E digo celebração, não afirmação ou contemplação. A fé só se adquire na concelebração, na convivência de um ato gratuito.

Como no exemplo de uma refeição de pão e vinho, na qual há refeição, mas uma refeição ritual. Os crentes creem na celebração do reino que está realmente presente. Concelebrando em gestos e palavras, o neófito se compromete com a fé. O que distingue o crente do não crente é o fato de que ele "celebra" toda a sua vida, assim como celebra esta refeição ou convivência.

Nessa perspectiva, o crente e o não crente estão em uma relação análoga à de dois homens que ouvem uma piada. Ambos entendem o significado das palavras, mas apenas um ri, isto é, compreende a história.

A dimensão inútil, gratuita e celebratória de todo homem que aspira à perfeição humana é algo difícil de fazer entender ao homem utilitário de nosso tempo, para quem até as cores se tornaram úteis: para aumentar a visibilidade de uma placa ou o preço de um livro. Igualmente difícil é hoje a comunicação do cerne da mensagem cristã: "buscai o Reino e todo o resto vos será acrescentado". É principalmente através do amor que o homem amadurece, ainda que o amadurecimento torne possíveis novos níveis de amor. O amor cresce na celebração do amor.

Com isso, chegamos a determinar o elemento

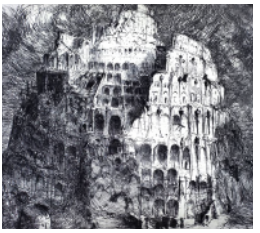
orientador rumo à perfeição humanista tal como nos apresenta a tradição cristã, bem como a forma de sua comunicação. É algo que encontramos na celebração do amor fraterno com Cristo. Portanto, não em uma doutrina, nem no desenvolvimento de um sentimento ou na busca de uma experiência individual.

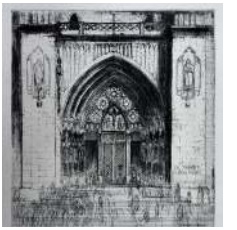
Tenho a esperança de que este ensaio — caricatura — fenomenológico ajude um pouco a reavivar a pesquisa psicológica da motivação e orientação para níveis mais elevados de maturidade, particularmente no homem que já declarou guerra aos demônios e aos pecados: à dominação por ideologias conscientes e, pior ainda, à escravidão às mentiras conscientes.

A vocação dos pobres à perfeição

Reformulemos a pergunta inicial: e depois da análise, o quê? Ou seja, depois de milhões de pesos, o quê "nas favelas"? Deveríamos tentar mudar a sociedade para anunciar o Messias, quando o seu reino já chegou, reduzindo-o a uma típica utopia? Ou deveríamos "evangelizar os pobres"? Jesus enfrentou esse dilema nos primeiros dias de sua vida pública, ao se identificar como o Messias diante do "último profeta", João Batista: "os coxos andam... e o evangelho é pregado aos pobres". Esta é a questão e o desafio neste momento.

Já falamos do homem diante da religião. Falemos agora do crente diante dos pobres. Creio que é hora de insistir que todo crente, antes de tudo, deve crer firmemente no seu próximo: deve crer que não há pobre tão humilhado, tão deforme, tão paralítico, tão possuído pelos demônios que seja incapaz de crer em alguém; deve crer que nenhum próximo é tão miserável que não possa perceber (provavelmente sem chegar a formulá-lo) a esperança messiânica naquele que o ama e crê nele; e que, portanto, se torna possível a concelebração nesta convivência de amor.





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First print run: 50 copies

Papers: Polen Bold 70 g/m^2, Tintoretto Ceylon 140 g/m^2, Triplex Supremo 250 g/m^2 (cover)

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